

THE SECRET OF MARRACOT DEEP — Hell's Creatures Came Out Of The Sea

# fantastic

ANC

S C I E N C E - F I C T I O N

JULY 35¢

**ALL STORIES NEW — COMPLETE**





# EACH NIGHT IT DOUBLED IN SIZE!

Each day it destroyed, ravished and plundered!  
A terrified world mobilized to fight the beast  
that had traveled —

## 20 MILLION MILES TO EARTH

### READ THE NOVEL!

#### 20 MILLION MILES TO EARTH

is a story that will  
shock you and astound you.

**BUY THE NOVEL—ON SALE NOW AT  
YOUR NEWSSTAND—ONLY 35¢**

### SEE THE MOVIE!

Don't miss the Columbia Picture starring  
William Hopper and Joan Taylor

— coming soon to your local theatre!



FANTASTIC, Vol. 6, No. 6, July 1957, is published monthly by Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, William B. Ziff, Chairman of the Board (1946-1953), at 64 E. Lake St., Chicago 1, Illinois. Entered as second-class matter at Post Office at Chicago, Ill. Subscription rates: U. S. and possessions and Canada \$4.00 for 12 issues; Pan American Union Countries \$4.50; all other foreign countries \$5.00.



BY THE EDITOR

### "20 MILLION MILES TO EARTH"

That's the title that's popping up all over the country; on theater marquees and on newsstands. Months ago, we decided to put out a new book here at Ziff-Davis—*Amazing Stories Science Fiction Novels*. This in response to the demands of our readers for full-length science fiction stories neither *Fantastic* nor its companion-book *Amazing Stories* are geared to carry.

But we discovered that deciding on the book and filling it were two different things. We read a lot of s-f novels but none was up to the quality-level we demanded.

Then, by strange accident, we got a hold of a shooting script of Columbia Pictures' new production *20 Million Miles to Earth*—at that time in the planning stage. There were several readings and every verdict was the same: "This is the best thing to come along since *King Kong*." Obviously, it had to be our first story.

We gave the shooting script to one of our finest writers, Henry Slesar. He read it at one sitting, here in the office, and we watched his eyes sparkle. We didn't ask him if he wanted to write the novel. His reaction gave us the answer.

The first of what we confidently expect to be a long series goes on sale the same date you'll pick up this issue of *Fantastic*. So grab both.

Then see *20 Million Miles to Earth* at your local theater. A double treat!

—PWF

# fantastic

JULY

1957

Volume 6

Number 6

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY  
William B. Ziff (1898-1953) Founder  
Editorial and Executive Offices  
366 Madison Avenue  
New York 17, New York

---

President  
B. G. DAVIS

Administrative Vice President  
WILLIAM B. ZIFF

Vice Presidents —  
H. J. MORGANROTH  
MICHAEL H. FROELICH

Vice President and  
Circulation Director  
MICHAEL MICHAELSON

---

Secretary-Treasurer  
G. E. CARNEY

Art Director  
ALBERT GRUEN



## FICTION

<b>THE SECRET OF MARRACOTT DEEP</b> By Henry Slesar.....	6
<b>CHANGE OF VENUE</b> By Richard Wilson.....	53
<b>GAS!</b> By Poul V. Dollos.....	58
<b>DARK MIRACLE</b> By Ivar Jorgensen.....	75
<b>HEADS YOU LOSE</b> By Gerald Vance.....	88
<b>THE DAY BASEBALL DIED</b> By Jim Cooper.....	96
<b>THE MARRIAGE MACHINE</b> By O. H. Leslie.....	110

## FEATURES

<b>LOW MAN ON THE ASTEROID</b> By The Editor.....	3
<b>ACCORDING TO YOU...</b> By The Readers.....	124
<b>IT SOUNDS FANTASTIC, BUT...</b>	128
<b>KNOW YOUR SUPERMEN</b>	129



Cover: EDWARD VALIGURSKY

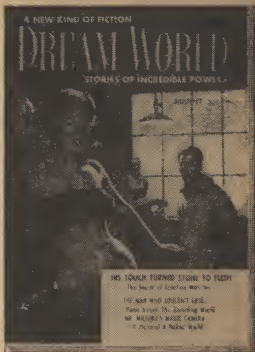
---

Editor  
PAUL W. FAIRMAN

Managing Editor  
CELE GOLDSMITH

Art Editor  
HERBERT ROGOFF

# HIS TOUCH TURNED STONE TO FLESH!



## THE SECRET OF LIFE WAS HIS

Read the unusual story of a man who discovered the power of creation . . . whose touch brought life to a marble image. It's typical of the exciting reading that awaits you in DREAM WORLD — America's newest science-fantasy magazine.

**DON'T MISS THE AUGUST ISSUE!**  
**NOW ON SALE EVERYWHERE — ONLY 35¢**





The invasion was on—the pattern,



carnage and destruction.

# THE SECRET OF MARRACOTT DEEP

By HENRY SLESAR

---

*In the beginning the sea gave us life and through the ages she has sustained and nourished us. But for what past sins does she now send us these monsters from her deeps?*

---

TWO days after he married her, Burt Holrood discovered that Jessie was half-wife, half-stranger.

The wedding had been a simple civil affair in the unromantic offices of a Los Angeles courthouse. But whatever romance the ceremony lacked was made up for by the honeymoon trip. The next afternoon, they boarded a DC-7 for Oahu in the Hawaiian Islands.

Jessie was all newlywed-sweet and bride-beautiful from the moment they entered the plane to the moment they pushed aside the latticed doors of their room in the modest little beach hotel called

the Keehoa. But later that day, Jessie's mood mysteriously changed.

They were lying on the sand, glorying in the warm sun and fragrant air, when Jessie turned to Burt and said:

"Please, Burt. Would you mind leaving me for a while?"

His young, quizzical face, already showing a sprinkling of sun-inspired freckles, wrinkled with puzzlement. It was an engaging face, not handsome, but the kind you enjoyed watching. He said:

"I don't get you, honey."

"I just want to be alone for a while. I'm afraid I get that way sometimes, Burt. I just have to be alone."

He frowned, and then tried to smile. "Okay, Garbo. Mother told me there'd be days like this. But don't forget—it takes two to make a honeymoon."

She turned her face from him, her dark hair spilling over her sculptured shoulders. Jessie was beautiful in more than face and form. Her movements were beautiful, too, fluid and graceful like the movements of a dancer. But she wasn't a dancer; she was a semi-successful commercial artist, with her own studio in downtown Los Angeles. Burt

was a photographer in the city, and they had met at a party for their allied trades. Within two months they had discovered enough about each other to marry. Now, as Burt watched her turn aside from him on the empty beach at Oahu, he wondered if he really knew enough.

He got up from the blanket and brushed sand from his knees.

"Okay, Jessie. I'll run back to the hotel and investigate the bar. Don't stay out too long."

She said nothing.

Burt stalked back towards the Hotel Keehoa with his spine stiff and his mouth grim. He tried to think of what he might have said or done to react upon Jessie this way, but nothing came to mind but the tender and passionate moments they had shared since the morning of the wedding. It was a mystery, and Burt didn't like mysteries. He liked his life to be clear and uncomplicated.

The hotel, a sturdy four-story building of whitewashed concrete, was quiet. He went across the cool wood-panelled lobby towards the curtained doorway labeled BAR.

There was only one patron, sitting at a small wooden table near the window that faced



the ocean. He looked up with a smile on his lined, British face that turned up one corner of his shabby gray moustache. Burt ordered a rum and soda from the Japanese barman, and sipped it glumly.

"Will you join me?"

The moustached man was grinning openly at him. Burt wasn't in the mood for company, but he picked up his drink and came to the table. When he sat down, the man said:

"My name's Nichols. Saw you arrive today, with your wife."

"Yeah," Burt said. Then he flushed at his own bad manners and said: "Name's Hol-  
rood, from the States."

The man nodded. "You did not have to tell me that. And I suppose you don't have to guess that I'm British." He laughed. "Speech betrays most of us. Others things betray us, too, but one can be wrong. For instance, it was my first guess that you and your wife were newlyweds."

Burt looked into his drink.

"Now I'm not so sure," Nichols said. He looked out the window, towards the distant speck of Jessie's yellow bathing suit. "Unless you've quarreled, of course."

"We didn't quarrel," Burt said curtly. "My wife just

likes to be alone sometimes."

"I beg your pardon." Nichols looked contrite. "I have an overdeveloped bump of curiosity. An offshoot of my profession. I'm an oceanographer."

"What's that?"

"Oh, just what it sounds like. My business is to be curious about the ocean; how deep, how hot or cold, all sorts of things."

Burt looked up at him. His face was angular and grave, his eyes serious, but his voice jocular. When he lifted his whiskey in his hand, he looked like a liquor model with his chiselled and weather-roughened features.

"Very interesting," he said dryly.

"You don't really think so. Your mind's on that beach. Well, I don't suppose I can blame you. Your wife's very beautiful."

"Yeah."

"How about another drink? My round."

They were starting on the third when they heard the scream.

Nichols' reaction was curious calm. He rose from his chair and looked placidly from the window. Burt joined him, and then realized that the scream had been his wife's.

"What's happened?"

The screams came again, short shrill outbursts of fear.

"It's Jessie!"

He exploded out of the bar, tipping over chairs in his anxiety. He ran through the lobby with Nichols after him, the older man running in measured but rapid strides.

Outside, Burt looked again towards the patch of yellow against the white sand and blue sky. But he saw another intruding color now, a splotch of bright red. He ran furiously over the soft sand, until he was close enough to the scene to see the source of Jessie's terror.

"My God!" he said.

His wife was trying to get to her feet, crawling away in loathing and horror from the monstrous crimson thing waving its terrible claws at her. Its eight spindly legs slipped on the sand, its feelers undulating rhythmically.

Burt recognized the ugly shape as that of a lobster, but his mind refused to accept the designation. No lobster had ever grown so gargantuan, or had such boiled-red color as this.

"Jessie!" he cried.

His shout seemed to thaw the icy paralysis in which she had been gripped. She scrambled to her feet and ran back-

wards into his arms. They watched the giant shelled creature snap its claws viciously in the air, and then begin a slow retreat to the shoreline of the Oahu beach.

Just as Nichols reached their side, the red thing had entered the water, and its trembling antennae were disappearing beneath the waves.

Then Jessie began to cry.

She sobbed against her husband's shoulder for a full minute, while Nichols looked off at the horizon. When she was capable of speech, the first question she had to answer came from the Englishman.

"Mrs. Holrood—would you be willing to give me a detailed description of that thing?"

Burt looked at him angrily. "What the hell! Can't you see she's scared stiff?"

"Of course. You can take your time about it, but I'd appreciate a full description."

"I can give you one," Burt said tightly. "It was a goddam big lobster, biggest lobster you ever saw in your life. And red, like it hopped out of a boiling pot."

Jessie was murmuring against Burt's shoulder.

"Those awful claws . . ."

"Come on, honey." He steered her back towards the hotel. "This is what you get for wanting to be alone . . ."

"Mrs. Holrood." Nichols was persistent. "May I talk to you about this later? It's really very important."

"Later!" Burt said.

He guided her gently up the beach, feeling male and protective, and despite his wife's shaken condition, a lot happier than he had been ten minutes before.

Nichols just waited on the beach, watching them leave. His heel dug a hole in the soft white sand. Then he looked out towards the sea again, and his face was thoughtful.

Two hours later, Burt came down the squeaky hotel stairs, looking for the dining-room steward. He spotted the hotel manager, a small-eyed European named Ferner, and said:

"Mr. Ferner, is it possible to have dinner in the room tonight? My wife's not feeling too well."

The little man paddled his vest and grinned. "Ja, sure, Mr. Holrood. I understand." He giggled, indicating that he really didn't.

Burt was heading for the stairs again when he heard the dry, jocular voice of Nichols.

"Oh, Mr. Holrood. Can you spare a minute?"

He came over frowning. "Please make it short, Mr.

Nichols. I don't want to leave Jessie alone too long. She's still pretty upset."

"I understand. Only I have to make one correction. The name is *Doctor* Nichols. Not a medical doctor; if I were, I'd be delighted to prescribe a sedative for your charming wife. But I'm only a doctor of science, ocean science, you see."

Burt tapped his foot impatiently.

"If your wife feels better this evening—"

"Look, Dr. Nichols, my wife is a delicate woman. That thing scared her half out of her wits. I'm having her stay in bed until morning. And even then—I'd appreciate it if you didn't remind her of what happened."

Nichols sighed.

"Your privilege, of course. I don't want to spoil the honeymoon." His words were jovial, but his face still grave.

"Good night, Doc."

Burt turned on his heel and went up the stairs.

Jessie was dry-eyed when he reached the room. He sat on the bed and put his arms around her. Her response was warm and bride-like again, and he grinned happily.

"Feeling better?"

She nodded. "It was just the shock—"

"I can imagine. Boy, I knew lobsters grew big. But not *that* damn big."

She shuddered, and he held her tighter.

"Okay, we won't talk about it. I asked the manager to have dinner sent up here. I guess he thought we were mighty anxious to be alone. Come to think of it, he's right. . . ."

The morning sunlight was bright between the slats of the blind. Burt looked over at his sleeping wife, grinned, and leaned over to kiss the inviting hollow at the base of her throat. He felt especially good this morning, and the thought of a pre-breakfast swim made him hurry into his trunks and beach robe.

It was only seven-thirty when he walked through the dining room. There was only one customer, a bird-faced woman in her late sixties, who was stabbing aggressively at a poached egg. She looked up disapprovingly at his costume. He saluted her with a wry grin, and went out the door to the beach.

The water was somewhat cooler than normal, yet still temperate enough to be comfortable. He swam out some thirty yards from the beach, and then floated around with

his face tilted towards the early sun. The sky was a blue masterpiece, and the one white cloud overhead looked like a misplaced pillow. It was idyllic.

Burt slapped at his midriff, and imagined he felt soft flesh. The thought made him eager for exercise, and he plowed his way through the quiet waves with long hard strokes. Then he sucked in air, and dove beneath the surface to get a look at the famed undersea life of the Island.

The moody, breathtaking colors thrilled him. A flat striped fish brushed his chest, and he grabbed for it playfully. Then he saw a different kind of fish. The sight startled him at first, until he realized that it was the familiar breed called Man.

He needed air by now, so he paddled his way to the surface and gulped in a lungful. Then he dove once more to get a closer look at his neighbor. He spotted the flapping rubber fins and circular face mask, and realized he was sharing the morning's exercise with a skin diver, complete with portable oxygen equipment.

The diver seemed to have noticed him, too. He beckoned upwards at Burt, and they both rose to the surface.

"Good morning!"

The man treaded water, and lifted off his mask. It was Dr. Nichols.

"Morning," Burt said, trying to keep afloat. "That looks like fun."

"It isn't. It's work—"

He began swimming towards the beach, and Burt followed him. The younger man's towel and robe were some forty yards from the site, but Dr. Nichols handed him a rough-textured towel from his own gear. After they had dried off, they sat on the sand and Nichols handed Burt an English cigarette.

They smoked silently for a while. Then the oceanographer pointed to the sea and said:

"I thought I might find our lobster friend. But I guess he's back for the deeps."

"What kind of creature was that? I didn't know they even *had* lobsters in this part of the world."

"They don't really. There's a kind of second cousin to the rock lobster here, but that wasn't a specimen of anything in the book."

"It was a big one, all right. Maybe we should have tried to catch it."

Dr. Nichols looked at him. "It's worth a thousand dollars if you do."

"What?"

"I'm sure the American-British Oceanography Society would pay it for our friend. You see, it's not the first time he's been spotted."

"No fooling?"

"He was reported on Oahu about six months ago. But the funny thing is—he was also reported on Catalina Island a year and a half ago."

"Catalina? That's a lot of miles from here."

"That's right. Perhaps not as far as you think, however—not when you're crawling on the bottom of the sea."

Burt grinned, and flipped his cigarette butt towards the water. "That's pretty deep."

"Deeper than you probably know. It's almost six miles deep, in the Mindanao Trench in the Philippines. And perhaps deeper than that in the place they call Marracott Deep."

"But nothing could live down there. Like our lobster friend, I mean. The pressure must be terrific."

"No," Dr. Nichols said. "For a human, the pressure of less than a hundred pounds could kill. But you must remember that the pressure of our deep-sea creatures is the same within as without. There are many living things in the deep, more than we can possi-

bly know about. The miracle of many of them is that they can rise towards other pressures nearer the surface, and still survive. Their air bladders adjust to the change if they move cautiously. As long as they don't 'fall' to the surface, they're all right."

"You mean that lobster came from the bottom of the ocean?"

"I don't know anything for certain. The bottom of the sea is still a mystery, but we're learning more and more about it all the time."

Burt looked thoughtful.

"I've got a theory," he said. "How about mutations? Atomic mutations? Couldn't all those Pacific atom tests have produced the thing?"

Nichols' face went blank.

"Possibly. Shall we start back for the hotel? I could eat a hen's yearly output this morning."

There was a pleasant surprise awaiting Burt on his return. Jessie was up and dressed and smiling radiantly, all ready for breakfast and a marvelous day. Her lovely shining eyes and good humor made Burt feel that life, as the soap operas say, could indeed be beautiful. He put his arms around her, but she shooed him off and told him to dress.

When they were seated in the dining room, Jessie began talking volubly, about every subject under the sun except the gallivanting lobster.

"I've just *got* to go back home with a tan," she said, her eyes dancing. "Can you imagine the cracks of the people in the studio if I came back all pale and white? You know what I mean."

"Sure, honey. Only take it easy; we've got three whole weeks to fry in. Don't do it all at once."

"Oh, I'll be careful. Say, are you starting to tan, or just more freckles?"

He grinned. "Just freckles. If I can get enough of 'em, I'll look okay. Oh-oh."

Dr. Nichols was approaching their table.

"Good morning, Mrs. Holrood. Feeling better?"

"Just fine. Won't you join us?"

Burt introduced the doctor by his title, and hoped that he wouldn't mention the lobster again. But the Englishman seemed content to chat about the weather, the Islands, and the Hotel Keehoa's interesting assortment of guests."

"Now that chap over there," Nichols whispered humorously, "the one with the bullet head and bloodshot eyes. He's been here a week

and never leaves the water except to eat. Think he'd be waterlogged by now, wouldn't you? It's my theory that he's a Russian spy."

Jessie giggled, capturing the mood. But Burt sat silently, not sure that Nichols' humor was ever intentional.

"As for that old lady over there, the one with the newspaper, she never leaves the front porch. However, she makes it all up by playing a mean hand of gin rummy. Took me for six pounds last week; never batted an eye."

"And how about yourself, Doctor?" Jessie asked, a bit flirtatiously. "Are you the athletic type?"

"Not in the least. In case you've heard about my skin-diving, I want to assure you that it's work, not play. I hate water unless it's in a glass, and only then with a little Scotch in it."

Jessie laughed loudly.

"As a mater of fact," Burt said, "I've been thinking about the skin-diving business. Is it difficult, Doctor?"

"Well, you should know what you're doing. However, if you'd like to learn, why not borrow my equipment this morning? I'm through paddling around for today."

"You mean it?"

"Certainly. Come up to my

room and I'll give you a short course in the art. Join us, Mrs. Holrood?"

Jessie shook her head: "I like the surface, thanks. You run along, Burt. I'll go out for a swim meanwhile."

"Okay."

A few minutes later, Dr. Nichols was displaying the paraphernalia required in aquatic diving. His descriptions were brief and lucid, and within another hour, Burt felt prepared to brave a minor depth in the device.

"Now don't overdo it at first," Nichols cautioned, as they stood on the shore. "And don't try and reach Marracott Deep on your first try. Just paddle around some fifteen or twenty yards from the shoreline, and get the feel of it. All right?"

Burt nodded, and slipped the mask over his face.

It was a strange and exciting experience, floating about in the dream-like atmosphere of undersea, not worrying about the need for air, having time to study and explore the exotic and wonderful marine life.

When he was under for some five minutes, Burt remembered Dr. Nichols' advice and decided to ignore it. He moved out further from the

shore, towards the deeper water, where the sea bottom seemed to slant sharply downwards.

Ten minutes later, he saw the movement of the red lobster.

It was hard to recognize the creature of yesterday in the hazy light. But as he came closer, the bright red color and enormous size was unmistakable. He pushed his way after it, keeping a safe distance from the great sharp claws.

It was heading for the shore.

Suddenly, the creature's speed increased. Its eight legs and huge claws began moving frantically, across the ocean bottom, as if the need to reach the beach was urgent. Burt lost sight of it momentarily, and then decided to surface.

He splashed through the water, and ripped off the face mask, just in time to see the scarlet creature reach the white sand.

Jessie's scream was even more terrible than yesterday's, the horror compounded by this second appearance of the gargantuan lobster. He shouted to her, and began swimming desperately to the site of the attack.

Then he heard the muffled

crack of a rifle, and realized that Jessie wasn't unprotected. Further up on the beach, his feet firmly planted in the soft sand, Dr. Nichols was aiming a high-powered weapon directly at the onrushing lobster. His aim appeared to be good; each repeated crack of the rifle reacted upon the creature. Most of the bullets seemed to be rebounding from its incredibly hard shell, but some were striking into the soft underbelly and brain.

By the time Burt reached dry land, the giant lobster was dead.

Nichols came towards them on the run, and Jessie fell trembling into Burt's arms.

"Well, we got the thing," Nichols said. "I wanted it alive, but this will have to do—"

"I like it better dead," Burt said grimly. Then his face hardened, and he looked at the doctor with inquiring eyes, searching for an answer.

"What I don't get is this, Doc. The thing was after Jessie again. Twice in two days."

"A coincidence."

"But it seemed to know where it was going. I was undersea at the time; I saw it heading for the beach, in a hell of a hurry. And there's a dozen people out on the shore now."



In his arms, his bride shivered.

Burt said:

"Why Jessie, Doc?"

The Hotel Keehoa came to sudden throbbing life. Guests that Burt had never known were there appeared in the lobby, buzzing about the improbable creature which had come up on the Oahu beach. An Hawaiian police official, summoned by the hotel manager, was busily taking notes that had no significance at all. As for Dr. Nichols, he was a blur of calculated activity. A phone call by the oceanographer commanded the immediate arrival of two burly young men, whose job it was to remove the carcass of the dead lobster and cart it to some place of study in Honolulu. Finally, the press seemed to get wind of the affair, and a grinning young Hawaiian named Hukoi was circulating among the hotel residents with a busy pencil.

When he approached Jessie, Burt threw up his usual protective block. But the little Hawaiian wasn't any less persistent than Dr. Nichols had been.

"Just a few little questions," he smiled. "Nothing to embarrass. For the local newspaper."

"Not right now, Mr. Hukoi. My wife's been too disturbed over the thing."

"Then perhaps you will answer some questions, Mister—"

"Holrood. Sure, I'll answer your questions. Just as soon as I get my wife upstairs."

Later, when Burt reentered the lobby, he found that Hukoi remembered the promise. He drew Burt aside, grinned amiably, and asked: "What is your wife's name, Mr. Holrood?"

"Jessica. We arrived here only yesterday, from Los Angeles. I'm a photographer, my wife's a commercial artist with a studio downtown." He went on to give a brief chronology of the events of the past two days. When he came to the second attack on Jessie, Hukoi's eyebrows lifted.

"Coincidence?"

"Of course," Burt said. "She was the only one on the beach yesterday, and today there were only a handful. That accounts for it."

"Naturally."

"Anything else?"

"One more thing." Hukoi lifted his pencil. "You have been married long?"

"No, just three days."

"Ah. And what was your wife's name before marriage?"

"I don't see why—"

"Please."

"Okay," Burt grumbled. "Her name was Jessica Burke. Can I go now?"

"Very sorry to have been a bother," Hukoi grinned.

Burt walked off, and saw the little hotel manager pacing the floor, squeezing his hands together in vexation.

"What's wrong, Mr. Ferner?"

"Ach! Such a thing to happen. A giant lobster in my hotel! But you understand, Mr. Holrood, the hotel is not liable for such happenings—"

"Don't worry; I wasn't thinking of suing. Where'd they take the creature?"

"Dr. Nichols is bringing it to the University in Honolulu."

"Great publicity," Burt smiled. "You'll have all the fishermen in town clamoring to get into the hotel now."

Ferner shrugged his shoulders, and Burt went to the stairway. In the room, he saw that Jessie was lying across the bed, face upwards, and peacefully asleep.

He tiptoed quietly towards her, and looked down at her lovely, clear-planed face, more beautiful than ever in repose. He stared at her for a long while, until he began to sense

that something was wrong. Her color was good, but there was something disturbing, something misplaced, something unnatural that he could not define.

Then he knew what it was.

His wife wasn't breathing.

"Jessie!" Burt cried.

He sat down on the bed, and shook her by the shoulders. "Jessie! Jessie! wake up!"

She stirred, and he could hear the normal rhythm of her breathing again. She opened her eyes, sleepily at first, and then in sudden panic.

"What's wrong? What is it?"

"Nothing," Burt said, sighing with relief. "For a moment, I was afraid—"

"Why? What happened?"

"You looked like you weren't breathing. I thought—"

"Don't be silly!" She leaned her head against his chest. "I'm just tired, that's all. I'm afraid you're not having much of a honeymoon . . ."

"I'm having a great honeymoon." He kissed her eyelids.

"I love you, Burt."

"I love you, Jessie."

It was a familiar dialogue, but they were fond of it.

That afternoon, in the lobby of the Hotel Keehoa, Burt ran into Dr. Nichols, looking flustered and busy. He stopped him in his tracks and said:

"Sorry to bother you, Doc. But I'm curious as to what's happening. Am I allowed to know?"

"Certainly, Mr. Holrood." He frowned at his watch. "I have to return to the University at five. That gives me a little time; how about a drink?"

"Sure thing."

They settled around the corner table near the window, and Nichols knocked back a sizeable amount of Scotch before beginning the conversation.

"It's the damndest thing," he said.

"What is? Our lobster friend?"

"A group of marine zoologists have been examining the creature for the past few hours. You should see the blighters; excited as kids with a new bicycle. Poking and prodding—"

"What'd they find out?"

"Well, it's a lobster, all right, no doubt of that. Some minor differences in the ratio of legs to torso, things like that. Also a superior hardness of the outer shell, proportional to its giant size. The color of the thing has them particularly fascinated. You know, at depths greater than about fifteen hundred feet, the fish are

usually dark-hued, often quite black. However, there are often unusual exceptions. Prawns, for instance. They're often bright red, too. One of nature's pranks, I suppose, since all the red rays of light are gone from water at such depth. They probably appear just as black as the other fish."

"How do they account for the thing? For its size?"

"They have all sorts of tentative theories already—including your own atomic one, Mr. Holrood."

"Might as well make it Burt."

"Fine. My wretched first name's Percival, so I hope you'll call me Nick." He grinned wearily.

"Sure, Nick."

They had another drink.

Nichols said: "How's Mrs. Holrood?"

"Okay now. Been pretty rough for her, being attacked twice in two days. You can't blame me for thinging that beast was haunting her. But I guess you were right; coincidence."

"Poor girl. But I think you can enjoy the rest of your holiday in peace and quiet."

"I hope so. Like to try that skin-diving business some more, if it's all right with you."

"You're welcome to the gear anytime, Burt."

"Thanks, Nick."

Then the doctor fell silent, and his eyes became moody.

"Sure there isn't something else?" Burt asked. "You look worried."

"Not worried," Nichols said. "Just bothered."

"About what?"

"Something I didn't tell you, about the lobster. Something I hope you won't repeat, not to anyone."

Burt's brow wrinkled. "Sure, anything."

Nichols turned his glass in his hands. "We found something on the shell of the creature. We didn't notice it at first; perhaps we might have missed it entirely if the inspection hadn't been so painstaking. And it's something rather disturbing."

"What was it?"

"A number," Nichols said. "The number 42-361, stamped in black on its shell."

At four, after Dr. Nichols had departed for his appointment at the University, Jessie came down the stairs, looking rested.

Burt came to her and said: "Look, I've got an idea. Best thing for us is to get away from this place for a while. How about going into Hono-

lulu for the evening? We can have dinner out, maybe dance a little, see the sights. Okay?"

"Fine," Jessie said. "I think that's a fine idea."

He captured the attention of Mr. Ferner, who listened to his request, and made arrangements for a taxi to take them into the city.

It was less than half an hour's ride into the famed capital of Hawaii, and they enjoyed the approach with all the innocent pleasure of tourists. Jessie loved the way the city rose from plain to mountains, loved the encircling opalescent waters and the splashes of exotic vegetation. They moved close to each other as they drove through the main thoroughfares, as if the beauty of the city inspired them romantically.

The taxi-driver pointed out the local points of interest and pride: the spacious, flower-rich park, the clean high buildings, the territorial capitol, and then on to the splendor of the Royal Hawaiian Hotel that rose beside Waikiki Beach.

"It's so lovely," Jessie said. "Like a fairytale city . . ."

"Notice something?" Burt grinned. "No billboards. Plain un-American, if you ask me. Put jokers like you and me out of business this way."

They rode on through streets bedecked with rare plants, with monkeypods and banyans, umbrella trees, palms, bougainvillea, tulip trees, and the everpresent hibiscus. The city was a garden, and in their present mood, it seemed to have been created especially for the Holroods.

They had dinner at the Royal Hawaiian, and dined on succulent native dishes that had them groaning happily at the end of the meal. Then they danced on the outdoor patio, until the moon rose fat and contented over the water. The setting was perfect.

By the end of the evening, all that had been lost between them since the hour of their wedding was recovered. Without tasting wine, they were drunk, and happily drunk, when they boarded the taxi for the return trip.

They reached the Hotel Keehoa close to midnight.

Just as they mounted the stairway to their room, Mr. Ferner, half-dozing at the front desk, called out to Burt.

"Mr. Holrood! A minute, please."

"What is it?"

"I'm very sorry," the proprietor said. "But the gentleman insisted, said it was very important—"

"What gentleman?"

"He's in the bar now. A Mr. Hukoi, from the Honolulu newspaper. He asked me to tell you to see him when you came in."

Burt frowned, and turned to Jessie.

"You go on up, honey. I'll take care of this guy."

"All right. Don't be long."

He let her go reluctantly, and went into the bar. His face showed his annoyance.

Hukoi was staring at a headless beer when Burt entered. The grin, that had seemed an inseparable part of the small, alert face, was gone.

"You have the time, Mr. Hukoi?"

The reporter looked surprised. "Twelve o'clock."

"A little late for an interview, no?"

"An interview is not quite what I came for, Mr. Holrood. I have information for you."

"What kind of information?"

"When I returned to my office today, I went to the morgue to get some background information on the lobster. I ran across this clipping."

He reached into his white jacket, and produced a folded strip of newsprint. Burt took it, his face puzzled.

It read:

## REPORT GIANT LOBSTER ATTACKS WOMAN

*Santa Catalina, May 24: An enormous lobsterlike creature has been reported on the beach of Catalina Island, California, by two witnesses. The giant crustacean, said to be bright red in color, is said to have "attacked" a young woman as she sunbathed on the beach. The woman, Miss Jessica Burke of Los Angeles, was said to have...*

The print blurred before Burt's eyes.

"This is crazy!"

"Ah," Mr. Hukoi said.

"Look, buster, if this is some kind of a rigged-up joke—"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Holrood. I had no idea what I would find when I looked up the file. I was merely seeking to write a somewhat better story than your, er, interview afforded me. I didn't expect to find this interesting—coincidence, really I didn't."

Burt read the item again.

*The woman, Miss Jessica Burke...*

Attacked once by an out-sized creature from the deep... attacked twice...

But three times?

He handed Hukoi the clipping. "Thanks very much,

Mr. Hukoi. It's very interesting."

"It does not disturb you?"

"Not in the least."

The grin reappeared on the reporter's face.

"Very well, then. Good night, Mr. Holrood!"

The recuperative powers of the young are remarkable; within another week, Burt Holrood and his bride Jessie appeared to have no problems in the world.

Burt's friendship with Dr. Nichols deepened during the days that followed, although Jessie seemed to only half-accept the oceanographer. The friendship centered upon their mutual interest in the art of skin-diving, and not a day passed without Burt improving his skill, utilizing the doctor's equipment.

On a Saturday morning, Burt made his first attempt at deeper waters. In a rented motorboat, he and Jessie explored the sea beyond the breakwaters of the island.

Burt tightened the flippers on his hands and feet, adjusted the portable oxygen equipment on his back, and grinned at her before slipping the mask over his face.

"I'll bring you back a goldfish," he said.

"Don't bother," Jessie,

laughed. "Just don't get mixed up with any mermaids."

He slipped over the side of the boat, and flipped his way towards the botom.

The eerie light and mysterious quiet never failed to thrill him; the weirdly contorted plants and shells were like statuary in some castle of dreams.

Then he saw the man.

The sight of another skin-diver wasn't startling in itself; the waters of Hawaii were plentiful with them. But the cause of Burt's wonderment was the fact that this diver had none of the life-preserving equipment he himself carried. The man wore only bathing trunks, yet he seemed as much at home in the deep as the fish themselves.

Burt stayed out of sight behind a tangled growth of seaweed, watching the strange figure. He recognized the man finally, the baldheaded man with the Teutonic features who was a guest at the Hotel Keehoa, the one whom Dr. Nichols had described as a swimming fanatic. But the shock of recognition wasn't as great as the shock of the man's actions.

He was lying down on the

sea bottom. He was resting.

Burt came closer, and the thought in his mind made no sense. But he could swear that—the man was asleep!

He paddled still closer, and in the murky light saw the man's eyes fly open, as if he had detected Burt's approach even in the silence of the undersea.

They stared at each other.

Then, with a bound that was incredible in the cumbersome depth, the baldheaded man leaped towards his throat!

Burt was so startled by the attack that he was instantly carried off balance. He brought his arms up to ward off the plunging hands, but they closed around his windpipe. He tugged at the man's forearms; they had the hardness of steel, thickly muscled beneath the smooth flesh. He thrashed and kicked his feet in an effort to break away, but the man held fast.

Then the baldheaded man changed his plan of attack. He twisted Burt's arm into a half-nelson, and began to reach for the oxygen equipment on Burt's back. Burt was helpless in his grip; in another moment he felt a change of pressure inside the face mask that terrified him,

and filled him with thoughts of suffocating death.

Violently, he wriggled his body until he squirmed out of the bald man's grasp. His as-sailant's thick lips parted in a ghastly grin, but Burt was too preoccupied to wonder how a human could survive with an opened mouth underwater. He was fighting to control his breath, before the air inside his mask vanished.

He kicked his way towards the surface, and the baldheaded man reached out almost carelessly to imprison his ankles.

He awoke with the pounding of a thousand surfs in his eardrums.

He groaned and opened his eyes, and seemed to see underwater faces peering at him.

Then the images clarified, and he realized that the anxious faces belonged to Jessie and Dr. Nichols.

"What happened?"

"That's odd," Nichols grinned. "I would have sworn you were going to say 'where am I?'"

"You got into trouble," Jessie said lightly, but her voice was strained. "Your oxygen tank went on the blink. Luckily, you came up

right near the boat. I brought you in and Dr. Nichols gave you artificial respiration."

Burt looked around their hotel room. When he looked back at Nichols, his face was tense.

"It wasn't any accident, Doc. I was attacked down there."

"What?"

"I said attacked, by our bullet-headed friend, the one you said was a spy—"

"I was only joking—"

"I know that. But whatever he is, that guy is more fish than man. I came across him on the bottom. It sounds crazy, but I could swear the guy was—well, sleeping."

He heard Jessie draw a sharp breath.

"When he spotted me, he made for my throat. Then he cut off my oxygen. When I tried to make the surface, he pinned my ankles. I must have kicked like a million mules in order to get away—"

"That's fantastic," Nichols said. "Sure you didn't imagine it? The sea plays funny tricks on the eyes."

"I tell you I saw him!"

Nichols went to the telephone.

"Who're you calling?"

"The police," Nichols said. "I think they ought to ask our friend some questions."



"No!"

It was Jessie's voice.

They turned to her, and she put her face in her hands.

"I didn't want you to know," she said, her voice muffled. "I didn't want you to ever find out, Burt."

"Find out what?" He struggled to sitting position. "I don't get you, Jessie."

"About me," she said. "About what I am."

Dr. Nichols cleared his throat. "Perhaps I'd better—"

"No, stay," Burt said. He got up and went unsteadily across the floor to his wife's side. "You're involved in something, Jessie. Something to do with this man. Is that true?"

She sobbed once, and put her head against his shoulder.

"I didn't tell you this," her husband said. "But my visitor last night was that Honolulu reporter. He found a clipping in the newspaper files, about the first red lobster report. It said that the woman who was attacked by the thing on Catalina was named Jessica Burke. You never told me that, Jessie."

"I couldn't. I wanted to forget it—"

Nichols was watching in fascination.

"Tell me now, honey. Tell me all about it."

He maneuvered her to the bed, and they sat down. She took her hands from her face and stared at the floor.

"I'm not human, Burt."

The stunned look on her husband's face caused her to explode in tears.

"No, no, that's not true! I *am* human, I am! Just different, Burt, just different! But I *feel* the way you do, inside. Just the same way, Burt—you've got to believe me!"

"You're not making sense. Different how?"

"In here." She thudded her small fist against her bosom. A difference in here. My lungs. An air bladder . . ."

"What?"

Dr. Nichols' reaction was a gasp.

"It's true, Burt. Don't love me the less for it—please don't!"

"Honey, honey," he crooned, his arms around her. "I wouldn't care if you had fins. I love you . . ."

"Maybe you won't. When you hear the rest—"

"This is incredible," Nichols murmured. He took a step closer to her, his eyes wide with professional curiosity.

"I was born under the sea," Jessie said, her eyes moist

and distant. "In the place you call Marracott Deep. We call it . . . Akumu. It's a city, an incredible city beneath the water. It sounds insane to me even now, but it's there. I've never seen it, but it's been there for centuries . . ."

Burt was shaking his head, rejecting the whole idea, trying to keep his life normal.

"It's true, Burt. There are thousands of us living below, our bodies adapted over generations to the pressure. We've lived in peace until now, Burt. But now, with the land-people probing into the very depths . . . Akumu is afraid. Terribly afraid!"

"I don't understand. Why are they afraid?"

"Afraid of the land-people. Afraid of investigation, of invasion. Afraid of your curiosity, your hostility, your greed, your thoughtlessness. Afraid of your weapons, your atomic bombs, your careless testing of nuclear power . . . The Akumus believe that once the land-people knows of the presence of their city, nothing less would satisfy them but some kind of belligerent action. And that would change everything for them, Burt. Everything! Don't you see?"

"No." Burt turned his head aside. "I won't believe it,

Jessie. This is some kind of nightmarish joke—"

"You must believe me, Burt. If you don't believe me, you can't help me. And they'll kill me . . ."

He stared at her. "Why? Why you?"

"Because I'm disloyal, Burt. Disloyal to their plan."

"What plan?"

She twisted the bedclothes in her hand.

"About a hundred years ago, since the first depth-sounding operations began, the elders of Akumu have been sending representatives to the land. From infancy, they bring us upwards slowly, allowing us to become adjusted to the pressure changes over many months, until we are enabled to survive in the topmost layers of the sea. Then we are brought to dry land. We're amphibious; we can live in air or water; the greatest problem is pressure. That was how I was brought here, Burt, at the age of three . . ."

"I can't believe it! You look—" He stopped.

"Like everyone else? I know. The differences are all internal. I've always dreaded the thought that I might need X-ray examination some day—and then you'd know."

"But why have they done this?" Nichols asked eagerly. "Why send these—representatives?"

"I can't tell you that," the girl said. "Please don't ask me to tell you that. It would be—a betrayal."

"Is it something dangerous?" Burt asked. "Are they plotting in some way against the land-people?"

"Please, Burt! You must understand. Even though I knew Akumu only as an infant, I was raised as an Akumu child. My 'parents' on land were Akumus who had been brought up from Marracott Deep many years before. I loved them as my own mother and father, Burt. And they taught me to love Akumu, and to be loyal to Akumu . . ."

"But you're not, are you?" Burt stood up and looked down at his wife. "That's what all the trouble is about. You're not being loyal, and that's why they want to kill you. Those lobsters—why do they keep—"

"Yes," Nichols said. "What about the lobsters?"

"They're the beasts of our world, the domesticated animals. Some trained to kill, and possessed of the instincts of a bloodhound. There are others, too, far more horri-

ble than the red lobsters—" She shuddered.

"But what have you done, Jessie? Why are they after you?"

"Nothing. I've done nothing. But that in itself is disloyalty. I didn't do what I had been commanded from birth to do. The first time, at Catalina, that was only a warning. But now—"

"Yes?"

She looked up at him, with such tormented eyes that Burt felt close to tears himself.

"Now I married you, Burt. A land-human. And there couldn't be any greater disloyalty than that."

Her husband swore, and smacked his fist into his palm.

"Let me remind you," Dr. Nichols said. "About our baldheaded friend."

"He must be one of them!" Burt said. "That's why he tried to kill me, because I saw that he was more fish than man—" He stopped when he saw Jessie's hurt look.

"How many are there?" Nichols asked. "Akumus—on land?"

"I don't know. Hundreds, maybe thousands."

Dr. Nichols went to his knees, and touched the girl's hand gently.

"You've already demonstrated which side you're on, Mrs. Holrood. I think you should go all the way. If you love your husband, if you want to be—well, part of our branch of humanity, then you mustn't mistake loyalty for foolhardiness. You must tell us what this danger is, what the Akumus are planning to do."

"I can't!" Her voice was shrill. "Believe me, I can't! Everything in me tells me to keep silent—"

"But if they plot something that will harm you or your husband—"

"I don't care about the danger. Because it won't happen in our lifetime. Don't you understand What they plan won't happen to Burt and me—it may not happen for a hundred years!"

Burt said: "How do you know?"

"Because I know, because that's what the plan is. It won't effect us, Burt. We can be happy together—"

"And what about your children?"

Burt looked at Dr. Nichols.

"I don't know," Jessie breathed. "I'm not sure we can have children." Her face grew cold. "But what am I talking about? After you've

heard all this, Burt, you won't want me for your wife anymore, will you? So the question's—academic."

Burt sat on the edge of the bed, and put his head down almost to his knees.

"You must change your mind," Nichols said carefully. "You must, Mrs. Holrood. Whatever the personal considerations, you cannot allow a catastrophe to occur. It may be as harmful to your own people as to us. Don't forget—wars have a habit of killing friends and enemies alike."

"It won't be a war," Jessie said hollowly.

"Then what will it be?"

"It won't be a war," the girl repeated. "A war has two combatants. There'll be only one—and only one weapon?"

"What weapon?"

"Water," Jessie said.

Burt and Dr. Nichols confronted the hotel manager together, and he shrugged his narrow shoulders at their question.

"I know nothing about the gentleman," he said. "Except his name is Frederick Kammer, and he gives his address as Los Angeles. But I have not seen Mr. Kammer all day."

"No," Nichols said dryly, "and I have a feeling you won't see him for a long time."

Burt said: "Let's get a drink. I need one bad."

In the bar, Nichols opened the discussion with: "Your wife has to talk, Burt. You know that, don't you?"

Burt nodded silently. "But I love her, Doc. No matter what, I love her. And I couldn't do anything that would hurt her."

"You don't have to hurt her. You just have to find out what these—undersea people are planning. Perhaps it's not as serious as she thinks, perhaps she's—"

"Wait a minute. You're not saying that Jessie's—"

"Crazy? No, Burt. The damnable thing is I *believe* your wife's story. That giant tattooed lobster, that half-man, half-fish—I'm afraid it all adds up too well. But we still don't know if there's evil intent behind all this. The thing to do is find out, and find out fast."

"But how?"

Nichols leaned back in his chair.

"You're her husband, Burt."

"But you heard what she said. She wants to live only for today—she figures this

damned catastrophe, whatever it is, won't happen until we're dead and buried. How can I get her to talk?"

"Perhaps it needn't be completely voluntary."

"What do you mean?"

"Sodium pentathol," Nichols said. "I can arrange for getting the drug. But you'll have to arrange for its use, Burt."

"Truth serum?"

"Something like that. I know you won't like the idea, but you have to see the wisdom of it. It's as much for Jessie's own protection as ours. We've got to know what we're fighting before we can deal with it."

"I don't know." Burt gripped his glass.

"It's the only way I can think of. If you've got a better idea—"

"All right. I'll see what I can do."

They walked up the stairway to the first floor some ten minutes later, and parted at the door of the Holroods' hotel room.

"Jessie?" Burt said.

She wasn't in the room, but the door of the bath was open. He stepped over to it.

"Jessie, you all right?"

Then he saw her body crumpled on the floor, and

the spreading red stain on her dress.

The small room was crowded in thirty seconds after Burt's shout of alarm. Dr. Nichols, Ferner, and a short-winded puffy-cheeked man who was the hotel doctor, all bustled around the girl, until the physician was able to turn to the anxious husband and say:

"She'll be all right. The cut wasn't very deep; she missed the main artery completely."

He bandaged the torn wrist, and then raised his eyebrows at Burt.

"Accident, would you say? If it was a suicide attempt, then I'm obligated to report it, Mr. Holrood."

"Of course it was an accident," Nichols snapped. "I'm Dr. Percival Nichols of the American-British Oceanography Society; I'm a close friend of the Holroods. We were celebrating only a few minutes ago. Mrs. Holrood is definitely not the suicide type."

The doctor shrugged. "However, the wound was inflicted with a razor—"

"It was an accident," Burt said. "I'll swear to that."

"Very well." He sighed, and reached for his instru-

ment case. "She's still unconscious, but she'll be all right in an hour or so. Perhaps I should give her a sedative . . ."

Burt and Nichols exchanged glances.

"Yes," Nichols said, "a sedative would be a good idea. But if you don't mind, Doctor, I'd prefer to have my own physician administer it."

The doctor bristled. "Very well."

"No offense. Sort of an—idiosyncrasy of mine."

"Naturally. Well, call me if I'm needed, Mr. Holrood. I'm always around."

Within an hour, the medical man summoned by Dr. Nichols to the Hotel Keehoa bustled into the room. He was a pale, gruff-looking man with a brusque manner.

"Damn foolishness if you ask me," he said to Nichols. "You have written permission to use this drug on the woman?"

"Her husband's permission, yes. But there's something important at stake, Dr. Hal-lam. I wouldn't have dragged you in from Honolulu if it wasn't vital."

The doctor grumbled some more, and then prepared the fluid in the hypodermic. Just before he inserted the needle, he said: "Hope you know

what you're doing; I don't like any kind of shenanigan."

After a few moments, Dr. Nichols was questioning Jessie, who groaned and moved her head from side to side on the pillow. Burt looked on, feeling miserable.

"Mrs. Holrood . . . Jessie . . . Can you hear me?"

"What . . . what is it?"

"I'd like you to tell us about Akumu, Jessie. I'd like you to tell us everything you know . . ."

"Akumu," she repeated, her face contorted.

"What is the plan, Jessie. What are they going to do?"

"Must keep them . . . keep them from finding out . . . our sacred duty . . ."

"What sacred duty, Jessie? Are you speaking of the Akumus now on land?"

"Yes," the girl said. "We must guard the secret closely, until the time for the great hour . . ."

Nichols looked at Burt. "That must be the task set for Jessie and the other Akumus on land—to prevent the land-people from discovering the city's existence, until they were ready to strike. But strike how?"

He bent over Jessie again.

"How, Mrs. Holrood? How will the Akumus complete

their mission? Will they destroy the land-people?"

"Yes!" Jessie cried. "Yes!"

Nichols blanched. "How will they do it, Jessie? You must tell us how!"

"I can't!"

"You must . . . you can't help yourself, Jessie . . . you must tell us the whole story . . ."

"NO!"

She sat up, and her eyes flew open.

"Amazing," Dr. Hallam muttered. "Never saw an effect like that under narcosynthesis . . ."

Burt came to her, his arms comforting. "Jessie, please. For your own sake, tell us the truth."

*"I can't, I can't, I can't!"*

She sobbed against his shoulder, and didn't stop until the room was cleared. Burt tried to comfort her.

Later, Dr. Nichols scratched his head and said:

"It's hard to understand. From what we know of the drug, she couldn't have resisted the way she did, unless there were physiological differences that might— Well, what's the difference. The point is we're still in darkness."

Dr. Hallam looked bewildered. "Is this a joke, Nick?

Underwater people? That's an opium dream—"

"More than that, I'm afraid. We've seen a great deal of evidence already. But I think we need something else—an X-ray of Mrs. Holrood.

"No," Burt said stubbornly. "My wife's had enough rough treatment. I'm taking her back to the States in the morning."

"But you can't—"

"I don't care about anything but her, Doc. I'm sorry. But all I care about is Jessie!"

That night, he held her close and repeated his words.

"I don't care about Akumu. I don't care about all this talk of undersea people, Jessie. All I care about is you. I love you . . ."

"I love you, Burt."

"We won't ever talk about it again. We'll live our life and let the world take care of itself. Is it a bargain, Jessie?"

"It's a bargain."

But the compact was more easily sealed than maintained.

Four hours later, as the moon rose placidly over the calm waters of the Pacific, its rays slanting through the blind of their room, a sudden

shadow appeared at the window.

Burt stirred in his bed, and pulled the light blanket over his head.

The shadow deepened, and wavered.

He opened one eye and looked towards the window. The moonlight was suddenly eclipsed by darkness.

"What the hell," Burt murmured.

He pushed his feet over the side of the bed and sat up, watching the window.

Then the gray tentacle lashed through the glass, spraying the room with ten thousand shards, whipped its suckered flesh directly towards him!

Burt shouted with involuntary horror, and behind him, Jessie was jolted awake with a scream in her throat.

The hideous body of the gigantic devilfish filled the hotel room window, squeezing its soft flesh through the frame, its eight arms thrashing towards Burt. Instinctively, he reached out and grabbed a cane chair, raising it over his head and beating at the monster's hide. Jessie screamed again, and huddled into the corner of the room. When she saw the great tentacles close around her husband's body, she made a



plaintive sound in her throat and collapsed in a merciful faint.

Burt struggled in the tenacious grip of the creature, almost overcome himself with revulsion as the cold wet flesh touched him. Wild thoughts raced through his mind, and a terrifying recollection of the poisonous secretion carried by the octopus. Its huge malign eyes and parrot-like beak filled him with something deeper than physical horror as the thing drew him closer and closer to its sac-shaped body. He began to scream uncontrollably.

Then blackness.

When he awoke, he smelled gunpowder in the room. He raised himself from the slippery floor, almost retched at the acrid sea-odor, and felt himself being lifted by a strong arm.

"It's all right," Dr. Nichols said. "We scared the thing off—"

He looked up at the oceanographer, and his eyes filled with grateful tears. Nichols was holding his rifle by the barrel. There was no sign of the gigantic devilfish.

"Jessie—" he said.

"She's all right. Just fainted; best thing she could have done."

Behind them, they heard the frantic clucking of Mr. Ferner, the hotel manager. Nichols shouted at him: "Shut that door! We don't want the whole world in here!" He helped Burt back to the bed. "Fired two shots at the thing, but I only wounded it. It went off down the beach and into the sea."

Burt looked over at Jessie, lying across the bed. She was stirring now, moaning meaningless words. He bent over and touched her face, and her eyes opened. She flung herself at him, and sobbed wildly.

When she quieted, Nichols said:

"Mrs. Holrood, listen to me. You thought you could live with this secret of yours, but now you know you can't. They're out to kill Burt, too. You saw that tonight."

She turned frightened eyes on him.

"You must give us all your loyalty. Your only chance now is to tell us everything."

"All right," Jessie whispered.

Nichols sighed deeply.

"I'll get us all a drink—and we can talk."

Later, sitting rigidly in an armchair, her face chalk-white, Jessie said:

"The Akumus plan to drown the earth, submerge it

beneath the water. I don't know when it will happen, but I was told as a child that it would be four generations hence. Their scientists are busy now, getting ready for the deluge. The only humans who will survive will be Akumus."

Nichols cursed under his breath. "Shades of Noah's Ark," he muttered. "And how do they plan to submerge the land?"

"I don't know for certain. But for the past fifty years they've been spreading equipment throughout the sea bottom, along the natural fissures that surround the planet at the core. I think they plan some kind of demolition around the globe, to cause enough tidal action to drown everything that lives by air alone . . ."

Burt slapped his knees. "It's crazy! We could never prove such a thing—"

"They've started experimenting already, on a small scale," Jessie said. "Causing minor earthquakes and tremors. You must have noticed it—a whole wave of earthquakes have been reported in the last two years. They're not from natural causes. It's the Akumus—getting everything ready . . ."

Her last words hung in the

air, and seemed to chill the small room.

"What about the Akumus on land?" Nichols asked. "These so-called representatives. What's their function? When you were under narco-synthesis, you said something about them preventing the land-people from finding out about Akumu. How can they do this?"

"By infiltration. The Akumus have been specifically brought up and trained to work as ocean scientists—"

"What?" Nichols went white.

"It's true, Dr. Nichols. The only way the Akumus could prevent their discovery was by placing Akumus among the oceanographers themselves."

"That's fantastic! You mean my *own* colleagues?"

"I don't know how many, or who they are. But there can't be any doubt of it, Doctor. Many of your co-workers *must* be Akumus—" "

The personal note in Jessie's revelation seemed to stun the doctor even more than the fantastic plan for drowning the continents. He sat down on the edge of the bed and stared at the floor, his hands kneading the bedcovers.

"What a terrible idea. My own people . . . even my friends . . ."

Jessie looked at her husband. "I had oceanography training too, Burt. I was supposed to enter the field when I completed school. But then, when my Akumu 'parents' were killed, I resisted the idea and became an artist."

"Killed? What killed your 'parents'?"

"I still don't know. Something awful—"

"One of those damned sea-beasts?"

Her hands covered her face. "They were off on a motor trip; their bodies were found on the shore, horribly mangled. That's all I know."

"Were they disloyal, too?"

"I—I guess so. They never spoke much of Akumu after I grew up. They became so quiet and withdrawn. I think they had come to love the land, perhaps more than they loved their memory of Akumu . . ."

"Then maybe there are other disloyal ones," Burt said. "Maybe your own colleagues, Doctor—"

The doctor stood up.

"We can't afford to wait another day. I want you both to leave with me tomorrow—for Washington."

"Why?"

"I have a close friend, in the Navy Department. Admiral Jake Colihan. I want him to hear every word of this. He's probably as skeptical a man as we'll run across there; he'll be a good test. Are you willing to come with me?"

Burt linked his arm with his wife's.

"We'll come."

The next day, the honeymooners and Dr. Percival Nichols boarded a plane stateside-bound. They made another connection in San Francisco, and went directly on to Washington, D. C. A long coded telegram, sent from Hawaii, preceded them to the capital. But despite the forewarning, the man they had come to see was too busy for a consultation until three days after their arrival.

When the meeting was finally arranged, they learned that Nichols had accurately described Vice-Admiral Jake Colihan's skeptical nature. He was a small, pocket-size naval officer, with an overlarge head and heavy-lidded eyes. While Dr. Nichols talked, he spun around slowly in the swivel chair behind his desk, frowning so hard that every crease in his sun-browned face seemed to deepen. At

certain points, he asked short, crisp questions of Jessie. Her replies, delivered haltingly, caused him to grunt.

After an hour and a half of patient listening, he folded his fingers under his chin and said:

"Let's have the truth, Nick. What is it, some kind of publicity stunt for the Society?"

The doctor's face fell. Then he rallied, and with all the intensity his voice held repeated his belief in Jessie's story.

Still Admiral Colihan seemed unperturbed.

Then Nichols exploded. "Damn it, Jake! What the hell have they done to you? You used to be a cocky son-of-a-gun; now you look like a brass monkey behind that desk. Do you think I'd stick my neck out if I didn't *believe* all this?"

Colihan grunted. "Okay, Nick, don't raise your blood pressure on my account. Least you can do is give me time to dig into the story. If there's something in it, I should find *somebody* to corroborate it."

"Maybe you won't. That's what's so bloody frustrating about this affair."

"Don't be so sure. I know at least one man who should know. Commander Hal Croft-

er, probably the shrewdest deep-sea man in the business, Navy-style. You know Hal?"

"Of course. But he may be as ignorant now as I was, three weeks ago."

"Well, let's give him a call," the Admiral said.

On the other side of the desk, Burt and Jessie sighed, hating the thought of rehashing the story once more.

But they did, for a sharp-featured Lieutenant Commander, who listened expressionlessly to the strange tale.

Then Crofter said: "Interesting, mighty interesting. I've had a few ideas about these mammoth sea-beasts myself. Got a file in my office, including a recent report on a giant squid and sting-ray that showed up in the Caribbean a month or so ago. I'm pretty certain they're atomic mutations—"

"No!" Jessie said. "They were there long before the atom tests!"

Crofter smiled at her indulgently. "There? You mean this—undersea city you came from?"

"Yes. From Akumu."

"Of course." His voice was bland. "Well, I don't say it's impossible—"

"You don't believe us," Burt said tightly.

"I didn't say that. I've been an oceanographer for many years, Mr. Holrood. I believe I know a thing or two about the sea, and what might and might not be under it—"

Nichols was fuming by now.

"All right. Ignore the whole thing. Wait until there are more earth tremors. Wait until there are tidal waves! Wait until the whole bloody world goes under—"

Burt leaned forward.

"Commander Crofter . . .

"Yes, Mr. Holrood?"

"Would you submit yourself to an X-ray examination?"

The question startled them all.

Crofter blinked, and then recovered his smile. "Certainly not. Why should I, Mr. Holrood?"

"You heard the story. I was just wondering if you would care to—well, exonerate yourself from any suspicion of prejudice in this matter."

Admiral Colihan's small face went crimson. "This is ridiculous, young man. Nick, I think you've carried this joke far enough."

The doctor sighed in surrender.

"All right, Jake. You're more hard-headed than ever. But that doesn't mean I'm go-

ing to stop trying. If you change your mind, you can reach us at the Hotel Broadmoor."

The Holroods and Dr. Nichols had adjoining rooms at the hotel. They returned there at five in the afternoon, and Nichols went off to keep an appointment. He left with one consolatory sentence directed at Jessie.

"You won't have to worry about sea monsters here . . ."

At six, Burt went into the lobby to get the evening paper. As he stood at the newsstand, the short hairs on the back of his neck began to tingle, and he couldn't erase the impression that he was being watched.

He surveyed the lobby casually. It was crowded with people, scurrying back and forth, sitting in the leather sofas and armchairs, chatting, reading newspapers, smoking quietly. None appeared to be interested in him.

He shrugged, and started back for the elevators.

There was a narrow mirror set between the cars, and it was only an accidental movement of his eyes that enabled him to see the man behind him.

With a shock, he realized

that it was Kammer, the water-breathing guest from the Hotel Keehoa in Hawaii, the Akumu who had tried to drown him.

He caught the baldheaded man's eyes in the glass, and Kammer turned swiftly on his heel and walked to the exit.

Burt hurried after him, pushing his way through the crowd into the street.

Kammer was walking rapidly, without looking behind him. He walked in brisk, short-legged strides, and Burt had to double his pace to keep him in sight.

He followed him for three blocks, and saw the bald man turn into a sidestreet. He waited for a moment at the corner, and then went after him.

It was an ambush, but Burt was expecting it. He ducked swiftly as Kammer's upraised fists descended towards the back of his neck. The blow glanced off Burt's shoulder, and he grunted in pain. Then he drove his own clenched fist deep into the man's stomach. Kammer went "oof!" and doubled over. Burt hit him again, throwing his body against the punch.

The struggle was over quickly. Once Burt saw he had the advantage, he bulled his

way straight at the bald man, slamming him against the bricks of the building. He saw the man's naked head snap back suddenly and land with an unpleasant crunch against the wall.

Then he slipped down to the ground, senseless.

Breathing heavily, Burt lifted him up and dragged him towards the street. He was a short, thick-set man, but his weight seemed all out of proportion.

A taxi came by slowly, and Burt waved his hand.

"Bars open early," the driver grinned.

"Too damned early," Burt grinned back. "Take my friend and me to the Hotel Broadmoor. Just down the street."

"Right, chief."

In front of the hotel, Burt put a five-dollar-bill in the cabbie's fingers and said: "Give me a hand with my pal, will you? I'll never make it alone, and I promised his mother I'd take care of him."

"Yeah, sure," the driver laughed.

They struggled through the lobby with their unconscious burden, and Burt tried to ignore the disapproving and amused stares of the guests and hotel employees. When he got Kammer to the elevator,

he steadied him against the wall and gave the operator his floor number.

Jessie came to the door and cried out when she saw Burt. He smiled weakly at her.

"I forgot the newspaper. But I brought something else."

She recoiled from the sight of the bald man, and when Burt dumped him ungracefully on the twin bed, she turned her head away squeamishly.

"We'll have to tie him up," her husband said. "Get me something, Jessie, anything. Rope, twine, maybe the cords from the blinds—"

"Shouldn't we call the police?"

"And charge him with what? No. we'll wait for Nick to come, and get his advice."

An hour later, with Kammer well-trussed and gagged, and already stirring himself awake, Dr. Nichols arrived.

His advice was short and to the point.

"Keep him right here. I'll get that hard-headed Admiral over here in a hurry—even if I have to tear down the Pentagon. Then we'll prove our story's true."

He went to the telephone.

Admiral Jake Colihan look-

ed down at the trussed body of the bald-headed man and his mouth opened.

"You've really gone out of your mind, Nick. This is plain criminal—"

"No," Nichols said. "The criminal part is still to come, Jake. This is the man that attacked Mr. Holrood in Hawaii. The fact that he followed us all the way to Washington is reason enough to believe he's up to something."

"That may be true, but—"

"Wait. The thing I want to prove is that the man isn't normal. If I had X-ray or fluoroscopic equipment here, I'd do it the easy way. But since I don't, I'm going to resort to something more drastic."

"What are you talking about?"

Nichols face went taut.

"We're going to drown him."

"What?"

Burt smiled. "Brilliant, Doc!"

"You heard me," Nichols said. "I'm going to dump our friend in a full bathtub of water. But you needn't worry about him; he'll be right at home."

"You can't involve me in this!" Colihan fumed. "I won't let you!"

"Give me a hand, Burt."

Colihan started a rush for the door, but Burt blocked his passage, snapping the lock.

"Let me out of here, young man!"

"Not until you've seen our demonstration."

"Don't make me use force," Nichols said. "I've got a rifle in my room, Jake. I'll turn the bloody thing on you if you don't cooperate. I'm serious!"

Colihan's shoulders drooped, and he smiled wryly.

"All right. You're either crazy—or telling the truth. Let's see your little demonstration."

With Burt's aid, the doctor carried the trussed figure of the bald man towards the bathroom. He was fully awake now, and he thrashed and kicked in an effort to get away. But they had the tub filled in five minutes, and were whipping off the gag.

"Help!" he shrieked. "Let me go!"

"Dump him," Nichols commanded.

They dropped him into the water with a splash, and held him down.

Admiral Colihan stood at the bathroom door, watching wide-eyed.

"You're killing him . . ."

"Not this way," Nichols said, panting with the exer-

tion. "You can't kill him this way."

For ten minutes they held the struggling body beneath the water, his round eyes staring out at them with fury and loathing.

Still he lived.

Five minutes more were enough for the Admiral. He said: "All right! All right! Let him up!"

"Convinced now, Jake?"

"Maybe. But I want a medical exam—"

"Suits me fine!"

In the front room, they heard the ringing of the doorbell.

"I'll get it," Burt said.

He went in, his arms dripping with water. The bellhop outside the door looked at him curiously, and handed him the evening paper.

"You left this in the lobby, Mr. Holrood. All paid for." He was staring at Burt's wet clothing, mouth agape.

Burt dug into his trousers and produced a coin, then slammed the door behind him.

He was about to return to the bathroom when the boldness of the headline caught his eye. He raised it and read:

**EARTHQUAKES ROCK  
PHILIPPINES  
HUNDREDS DIE**

**FANTASTIC**



Nichols saw his face and said:

"What is it, Burt?"

"Look at the headline. Still more earthquakes in the Pacific. I have a feeling that Jessie's timetable is all wrong. I think our friends in Marracott Deep have decided not to wait a hundred years . . ."

It took twenty-five precious days of meetings and secret sessions and high-level conferences before a decision was reached. And even that day saw dissension among the military, political, and scientific brains that were assembled in Washington for a plan of action.

It was General Stafford, a youthful-eyed, trim-figured man in his late sixties, who chairmanned the meeting, and was most cantankerous about each proposal for meeting the menace of the undersea people.

"I say investigate further," he told them. "This body of evidence you've gathered is alarming, no doubt of that. But it doesn't constitute irrefutable proof."

"That's a problem, of course," Dr. Nichols said dryly. "At present, we have no way of sending an exploratory force down to the bottom

of Marracott Deep. No deep-diving equipment can attain nearly that depth without being crushed like an egg-shell. The development of such equipment is not too many years off, but I'm afraid we don't have that much time."

General Stafford scowled at him.

"And you honestly believe that these recurring quakes are the beginning of this—plot?"

"I'm convinced of it, General. They're following a pattern in the Pacific that leaves no doubt in my mind, or my colleagues. And they're occurring with increasing frequency and intensity. As you've probably heard, there was a number nine quake in the Hawaiian Islands yesterday evening, at dreadful cost of life and property."

Burt Holrood, sitting in a chair by the wall and feeling misplaced in this high-powered conclave, folded his arms against his chest and thought harsh thoughts about the General. Burt had been a corporal not many years before.

"And these sea-monsters of yours?" Stafford said. "You're certain they're part of this undersea city?"

"There's no other explanation. Only two have been actually captured—a gigantic

lobster and octopus. The octopus was washed ashore only two weeks ago, on Brooks Island. We know it was the same creature which attacked Mr. Holrood and his wife that night in Oahu; my own rifle bullets were found in its body. I trust you've all seen the photographs which clearly show the identification number tattooed on its head."

"Incredible," a scientist murmured. "Branded sea-cattle . . ."

"And branded killers, too."

General Stafford shifted in his chair.

"All right, then. Let's hear about this — counter-attack you're planning."

The faces around the table looked towards the white-haired gentleman at the end whose aged but cheerful face looked up and broke into a wan smile.

"Dr. Uribe, of the Atomic Energy Commission," Nichols said, "knows the plan better than any of us. I'll let him tell you."

The scientist cleared his throat.

"I needn't tell this group of the exploratory work done during the recent International Geophysical year, with surveys Norpac and Equapac; nor of the work done in the

last few years by AEC in conjunction with the American-British Oceanography Society. Basically, our purpose was to evaluate the age of the deepwater in the ocean, to determine how great the danger of nuclear-waste pollution.

"We had no such problem as this in mind, of course. But our findings may well provide us with the answer we seek here. We have established that the rate of movement and transport of the subsurface and deepwater masses are incredibly slow processes, and that the age of the water in such a place as Marracott Deep may well be over ten thousand years."

The General tapped the desk impatiently.

"What does that prove, Dr. Uribe? As far as this counter-action is concerned?"

"If this problem is truly serious—and I'm inclined on the evidence to believe the human race has never been more endangered—then we would be justified by using Marracott Deep as a resting place for our radioactive waste materials."

The reaction around the table was excited, and somewhat fearful.

"We believe that by dumping such substances into the Deep, we will effectively de-

stroy all life—of whatever kind—without seriously endangering the welfare of the rest of the world. There will be problems, of course, with fisheries and so forth, and probably some radiation troubles developing in the nearest land points to the Deep. But we can be prepared there, too.”

He looked around the room solemnly.

“It is not easy for me to sit here and propose such a monstrous idea as this.”

He bent his old head towards the table.

“I have nine grandchildren,” he said. “None of them swims especially well.”

There was silence in the room for a full minute.

Then Burt cleared his throat and said:

“I don’t have any right to make suggestions. I’m only here out of sufference. But I’d like to say something.”

General Stafford nodded at him.

“There’s one topic we haven’t discussed in this meeting, but we should. I’m talking about the fifth column of Akumus who are on shore now, who have been infiltrated into positions of importance in ocean. I think we’d better find out who they are, and quickly.”

Nichols looked at the chairman sadly.

“I’m afraid that’s true. We must begin immediate X-ray examinations of all personnel connected with oceanography in any way. We mustn’t allow our counter-action to be thwarted within our own ranks.”

“And what,” Stafford said, “do you plan to do with the—Akumus you locate?”

“I suggest that the government place these men under temporary arrest, until their loyalty or disloyalty can be proved. Or until there is no more menace in Marracott Deep . . .”

When the meeting was over, all the hesitation and indecision and arguments seemed over, too. It was a time for swift and methodical action.

A dozen different government agencies set their wheels into motion, from the Federal Bureau of Investigation to the Bureau of Naval Sciences. With speed and precision, arrangements to implement every part of the project known officially as “Anti-A.”

Burt found himself an important figure in government circles, acting as spokesman for his wife and as special assistant to Dr. Percival

Nichols. He attended meetings with some of the nation's top oceanographers, and listened to their analysis of the plan which the Akumus were already putting into deed.

"This map will make it clearer," a scientist named Vidor told him, poking his finger at a sectional drawing of the earth's profile. "This land area represents the surface of San Francisco, perched over the crack known as the San Andreas Fault. The Fault is a break in the granite layer beneath the earth's crust, and at intervals it shifts and slides, causing tremors. If this process were aided along by some undersea influence—the results could be disastrous.

"Here, off the bottom of northern California, is what we call the Mendocino Escarpment, an immense fracture in the earth's crust more than a thousand miles long. This is one of several fractures extending from the San Andreas Fault.

"There is an extension of the California fault system in the Aleutians. You recall the earthquakes in the Aleutians back a few years? They give us a foretaste of what will happen if such quakes become widespread. The tremors in the Aleutians caused tidal

waves as high as thirty-two feet in the Hawaiian Islands. The shock carries great tidal waves in concentric circles from the center of the quake. The recent Philippine earthquakes caused tidal action as far as Japan and Korea."

Burt examined the charts grimly

"Then enough earthquakes, of enough intensity, could drown the coastal areas—"

"Worse than that. If these undersea people have demolition equipment which can use the faults in the earth's crust to their own advantage—they can drown the whole world."

Dr. Nichols looked at the map and said:

"We'll stop them first."

Then the X-ray tests began.

Within four weeks, six hundred and forty civilian oceanographers, with some natural reluctance, paraded in front of the nation's X-ray technicians. A hundred and twelve revealed an unusual formation where their lungs should have been. The majority of these, faced with the photographic evidence, confessed to their origin at the bottom of Marracott Deep. Some protested their innocence to the last, but were placed under arrest and herded off to a

special internment camp in Oregon.

Burt marveled at the discreetness with which the examinations were held. Not a word of the arrests leaked to the newspapers or public; no comment about Project Anti-A appeared anywhere in the nation's press. And more importantly, not a mention was made of the vital task imposed upon the aircraft carrier *Dragonfly* that was being outfitted in San Francisco for an unusual tour of duty.

Burt, Jessie, and Dr. Nichols visited the dock where the flying airfield was being readied.

"Look at the size of her!" Burt whistled.

"Biggest carrier built since the war," Nichols told them. "Large enough to carry a whole armada of jet fighters anywhere in the seven seas. Only she won't be carrying jets this trip. She'll have a lot more deadly cargo—"

"How will the crew be protected against the radiation from the waste materials? With all that hot stuff aboard—"

"Everything will be lead-lined, of course. But not even lead shielding can hold back all the rays indefinitely. When they strike bottom at Marracott Deep, they'll be timed to

release enough radiation to wipe out everything alive down there..."

Jessie shivered.

"I hate to think about it. They're still my own people . . . perhaps my own family . . ."

"I understand," Nichols said gently.

They started back for the parked auto some forty yards from the dock. There were two men in civilian clothes waiting by the auto door. One of them took out his wallet and flipped it towards the oceanographer.

"Dr. Percival Nichols?"

"Yes?"

"I'm sorry. We have to ask you to come with us."

He stared at them. "Is there anything wrong? Did something happen?"

"We're placing you under arrest, Dr. Nichols."

Jessie gasped.

"I don't understand you," the doctor said calmly. "Just what charge are you making?"

The second man said: "You should know that, Dr. Nichols. You took your X-ray test this morning."

He looked at them with bewildered eyes, and then turned to Jessie and Burt as if to reassure himself that the world was normal. Then he

smiled unconvincingly and said:

"There's some silly mistake. I'm no Akumu."

"We have our orders, sir."

"But it can't be true! My parents were—" He stopped, and seemed to grow dizzy for a moment. Burt put out his arm to support him. "I don't know who my parents were," he whispered. "I was adopted, as a foundling . . . as an infant . . ."

"We really have to go now, Doctor."

"We'll come with you," Burt said. "We'll follow in our car, Nick. I'm sure it's all a mistake—"

"Yes," the doctor said blankly. "It has to be . . ."

They watched the men lead him away, his steps hesitant and uncertain.

Two days later, Burt and Jessie were summoned to the offices of Vice-Admiral Jake Colihan in the Pentagon. They were relieved to see Dr. Nichols sitting unguarded at the Admiral's desk, but he no longer appeared to be the self-assured, vigorous man they had known.

Colihan leaned back.

"This is an unfortunate situation. The two people most closely involved with this affair—yourself, Mrs. Holrood,

and my good friend, Nick—are both members of the amphibious race we plan to destroy."

Jessie looked at the doctor, who met her eyes sadly.

"Dr. Nichols, unfortunately, knew nothing about his origin. Or perhaps I should say fortunately. His adoptive parents developed in him a love of the sea and its mysteries, but never once spoke of Akumu. It would seem that they, like yourself, Mrs. Holrood, wanted to live in peace on land. The discovery, as you can imagine, has been a shock to Dr. Nichols—and given us a tactical problem."

Then his face seemed to lighten.

"However, we have talked this over carefully at the highest level. None of us doubts for a second the loyalty of you both."

Burt sighed, but Jessie and the doctor just looked at the floor.

"The hard part comes next," Colihan said. "The destruction of your own people. The death by radiation of thousands of Akumus like yourselves. That is what we plan next week, with the departure of the *Dragonfly* for Marracott Deep.

"This isn't an easy thing for either of you to face. But

nevertheless, I'm going to ask all three of you whether you wish the dubious privilege of making the voyage with the carrier."

"No," Burt said. "Not Jessie—"

"There's no necessity, of course. I just thought—"

"Wait a minute." Jessie's head tilted. "I do want the privilege, Admiral. I feel I should be there, at the end as at the beginning. If your regulations will permit it, I would very much want to go."

Nichols spoke, his voice tired.

"You know how I feel, Jake."

"Then it's settled. We weigh anchor on Thursday of this week. We'll make our rendezvous with the escort cruiser on Saturday. We'll be on the target area on Wednesday next."

The day broke bright and clear over the Pacific when the *Dragonfly* and its escort reached the point in the ocean over the place known as Marracott Deep.

Few of the hundreds of crew members aboard knew the real purpose of the carrier's visit to mid-ocean. Essentially, it was a dumping expedition, a gigantic garbage-disposal job, getting rid

of tons of radioactive waste materials produced by the atom factories of the U. S. and Great Britain. Among themselves, the officers and men joked about it.

But in the Captain's quarters, and in the wardroom where Admiral Jake Colihan and his senior officers met to plan every step of the undertaking, there was no levity.

And on the deck, overlooking the incredibly long stretch of carefully-secured lead containers that lined the enormous surface of the carrier, Burt Holrood and his wife Jessie were also in a solemn mood.

"We shouldn't have come," Burt said. "There wasn't any need to come, Jessie."

"I wanted to, Burt. It would have been worse for me on shore, waiting." She turned suddenly fearful eyes on him. "Oh, Burt, what if it doesn't work? What if the radiation doesn't destroy Akumu?"

"It'll work. Nothing will be able to survive. All those giant undersea things, all the fish for miles around, all the humans that live down there . . ." He pulled her to him. "Thank God they sent you to the surface, Jessie. Thank God for that . . ."

She clung to him.

"I wish it were over, Burt . . ."

But it wasn't over.

Half an hour later, forty minutes before the dumping of the atomic waste was scheduled, Burt and his wife met Dr. Nichols in the fore-castle.

He greeted them with forced cheerfulness. "Another few minutes, and the job will be done. The Admiral's calling all officers into the ward-room for a final briefing. Let's go below and sit in."

They went down a series of tortuously - winding ladders, until they came to the small meeting room. It was filled with high-ranking naval personnel, and four civilian scientists. Only one officer wasn't in attendance.

When Colihan walked in, he frowned at his audience and commented on the absentee.

"Where's Crofter?" he said. "I thought I saw him on deck."

"Crofter!" Burt said to his wife. "That's the guy we met in Washington, the Navy oceanographer. The one who thought we were having pipe dreams—"

The door opened, and the lean figure of the Lieutenant-Commander entered. His sharp-featured face was flush-

ed, and he grinned at the assemblage.

"Come on, come on," Colihan said impatiently.

"No hurry, Admiral," Crofter grinned back. The insolence in his voice jarred the others. "No hurry at all."

"What are you talking about?" Colihan's small face was hardening. "You forget yourself."

"No, Admiral. I remember myself. I remember myself very well."

Now they were all staring at him.

"Something's wrong," Burt whispered.

Crofter stepped in front of the Admiral and raised his hands.

"I'll address my remarks to you all, so that everyone has a clear idea of what's happening—"

"Sit down!" Colihan thundered. "That's an order!"

"Orders be damned. You'd better listen and listen carefully, Commander. Or when the bomb hits, you'll be a very surprised man."

Nichols jumped to his feet.

"What bomb? What are you talking about?"

"Ah, Dr. Nichols." He grinned at the scientist. "My dear colleague. My dear Akumu . . ."



"You're drunk!" Colihan snapped. "Place this man under arrest—"

The officers in the room moved towards him uncertainly. There was something authoritative about Crofter now that had nothing to do with rank.

"You really must listen," he said easily. "If you wish to save your lives, you must pay attention. *The radioactive substances must not be dropped.* The ship must be turned about and taken to San Francisco immediately. The atomic waste can be disposed of in any manner you wish. But it must not be dropped in Mar-racott Deep."

"Akumu!" Burt said quietly. "He is one—"

"Of course." Crofter looked in his direction. "Just as your lovely wife is Akumu, Mr. Holrood. Only I'm not a turn-coat Akumu—I'm happy to be loyal to my homewater . . . to do what I can for it."

"The man's mad," Colihan said. "Arrest him at once; we have work to do—"

"Wait," Nichols said. "Hear him out."

"Thank you, Akumu," Crofter bowed. "It's a wise decision. But I'm here to tell you that the moment the first lead container is dropped over the side of this carrier—

the *Dragonfly* will be destroyed."

The room was filled with shouts of anger and disbelief and fear.

"It's the deadly truth. There are Akumus waiting below this ship, ready to explode a nuclear weapon at the first signal. That signal is the splash of the first lead container into the sea. If you wish to avoid this tragedy, I suggest you give orders now to turn this ship homewards."

"It's a damned lie!" Colihan shouted. "A trick! You would dare to blow up the *Dragonfly*—that would be certain death for you and everyone down there. The radiation waste would descend just the same—"

"That is the situation, Admiral. If you wish to sacrifice the life of your officers and men to prove that I'm not bluffing—you're welcome to go ahead."

"Jake," Nichols said uneasily. "Think this over—"

Colihan whirled on him. "You expect me to take advice from *you*?"

The words hit Dr. Nichols like a blow. His friend looked instantly contrite, and then his shoulders slumped wearily.

"There's no proof. It's all a bluff . . ."

"It's no bluff," Crofter said. "Look out the porthole, Admiral. You'll realize I'm telling the truth."

Colihan strode across the small room and peered out of the tiny round glass in the hull. He gasped, and Nichols and Burt came to his side.

The waters of the Pacific were no longer unruffled and unbroken blue. There were visitors encircling the giant aircraft carrier, hundreds of naked swimmers bobbing in the sea, dozens of strange aquatic creatures rising from the surface. Giant squids and stingrays and jellyfish, and an enormous octopus with tentacles almost thirty feet in length, clinging to the side of the hull with its disc-shaped suckers.

Admiral Colihan stared at this fantastic encirclement, and every muscle in his small face seemed to jerk.

"What can we do?" he said, only to himself.

"We must have time," Nichols said. "Time to think it over!"

"It will be nightfall in three hours," Crofter snapped. "I'll give you until then."

He turned and stalked out of the wardroom.

When he was gone, Colihan

cleared the room of everyone but his senior officers.

Burt took Jessie's arm and led her back to their quarters. She appeared white and faint after Crofter's announcement, and asked to lie down.

"Sure, honey. I'm going to try and find Nichols—see what he says about all this."

He went out, but Nichols was nowhere in sight.

For two hours, the Admiral and the ship's officers argued, but found themselves at a stalemate.

Admiral Colihan stood adamantly by his proposal to scuttle the carrier, but the others seemed solidly lined up against him. It wasn't a question of courage or sacrifice, they said. It was only common sense. There would be other opportunities; they would be better prepared next time—

"Perhaps there won't be a next time," Colihan said blackly. "Perhaps they're planning to make their moves now, right now . . ."

With half an hour left, and with darkness settling around the great ship, the decision was yet to be made.

Burt returned below and went to the wardroom. His knock gained him admittance.

"All decided?" he asked.

The officers looked at him wearily.

"I've been looking for Dr. Nichols. I couldn't find him on deck, so I—"

He stopped when he felt someone behind him. He turned and looked into the grinning face of Lieutenant-Commander Crofter.

"Only a few minutes left, gentlemen. I hope you've reached your decision. My friends in the sea are getting anxious."

The Admiral growled at him. "There's still time, Crofter. Don't rush us."

"Of course. But you must know by now that you have no alternative. The carrier must turn back; it's the only sensible course."

A communications light flashed in the wardroom. An officer picked it up, and then turned to the Admiral.

"It's the radio room, sir. Message from the cruiser."

"Probably want to know what's delaying us—"

"No, sir. It seems that the message is for Mr. Holrood."

Burt blinked at him. "Me?"

"Yes, sir. They say it's very important."

Crofter grinned at him. "I haven't seen your beautiful wife around, Holrood. You must be grateful to Akumu

for producing such a lovely woman."

Burt frowned, and pushed past him, heading for the radio section.

The operator looked up, his face puzzled.

"I must be crazy. But I could swear I heard that guy say your *wife* wants to talk to you—"

"My wife? You *are* crazy. My wife's asleep in her quarters for the past couple of hours. I left her there and told her not to leave—"

He sat down, and the operator pulled a switch on the board.

"Burt . . . Burt . . ."

"*Jessie!*" The sound of her faint voice on the wireless sent the blood rushing to his head. "Jessie, for God's sake! How the hell did you get on the cruiser?"

"Burt, listen—"

There was a crackle in the equipment, and the operator spun a dial, his eyes wide and curious.

"What's happened, Jessie? How did you get off the ship? This doesn't make any sense—"

"We swam," his wife's voice said, "Dr. Nichols—" She seemed to be gasping for breath. "It was the safest thing—we couldn't return to

the ship—they suspected us—”

“I don’t understand—” Burt’s voice was wild. “Why did you leave? What for? And where’s Nick?”

“He wanted to come with me—he thought it was only right when I told him what I wanted to do— Oh, Burt, he’s dead! I—I tried to bring him in, but he couldn’t make it—his bad heart—”

“Jessie, take it slow!”

“I wanted to find out—to go beneath the ship and see if what Crofter said was true—to talk with the Akumus.”

“Oh, my God . . .” he moaned.

“It was the only thing I could think of, Burt! I felt so—responsible for all this.”

“But what happened?”

“We . . . we slipped over the side of the carrier into the sea . . . we went below . . . they didn’t suspect anything at first . . . they thought we were part of the Akumu task force . . . there were even other women in the water.”

She stopped, fighting for control of her voice.

Then: “I—I spoke to one of them . . . it was so hard . . . it was a language I hadn’t had on my tongue since I was a child at home . . .”

“What did they say? What did you learn?”

“There is no bomb, Burt! It was all a bluff—they didn’t dare to use explosives . . . it would have the same effect as the dumping, and cost them their own lives . . . we’re not all martyrs, Burt . . .” She began to sob openly now.

“Dr. Nichols,” she said at last. “He’s dead, Burt . . . he couldn’t make the cruiser . . . he couldn’t hold out . . .”

“Jessie, listen! I’m going to report this to Colihan immediately. We’ll radio again soon.”

“Be careful, Burt! Please be careful!”

Burt went to the wardroom.

They stopped their conversation when they saw his eyes.

“Dr. Nichols is dead,” he told them. “There isn’t any bomb below the ship. We can dump the cans . . .”

“It’s a lie!” Crofter shrieked. “It’s a damned lie!”

He told them the story. They left the room quickly, to start the process of unloading the deadly cargo they carried.

Burt went to the porthole, and saw the nose of the cruiser outlined against the dark sky.

On the deck, he heard the first splash that signalled the end of life in Marracott Deep.

**THE END**  
**FANTASTIC**

YOU need a powerful television antenna down east in Camden, Maine, to get any kind of reception at all, and that's what the gadget on top of Hal Parsons' house looked like. But it wasn't. It was part of what Hal called his sky trap. And after his disappearance, we got to calling it the Mars machine, in a skeptical Yankee sort of way.

We all knew him as Hal despite the string of degrees he was entitled to use after his name. He was gaunt, stooped-over and fiftyish. He'd never been known to crack a smile but he had one of those deadpan senses of

# Change of Venue

By RICHARD WILSON

---

*Hal Parsons wasn't interested in the Martian's scientific knowledge. He wanted to know how they shaped up morally. Had they written a Bill of Rights? Hal had a good reason for wondering.*

---

humor that we can appreciate in these parts.

Hal was an outsider, like myself. He came from the west—Boston, I think. He settled down here so he could fool around with some of his ideas after a spell of teaching in one of the universities. Taught a lot of fuddy-duddy subjects, he once said; didn't have any free time to do the things he wanted to. He'd been a frugal man, a bachelor, and he'd come down here with his savings and bought a small house on a neck of land that formed one side of the cove where I keep my tourist boat.



My schooner cruises are a seasonal business and in early spring or late fall Hal would come out with me on my windjammer and we'd sail around Penobscot Bay, just the two of us, looking over one island or another. He thought he might buy one some day and settle down to do a little farming or lobstering as a sideline to his experiments.

He never did, though. A pity, too. Hal could have made a go of it, I'm sure. He accomplished everything he ever set his mind to. That was his undoing, I guess. He started fooling around with those Martians and couldn't break off while it was still safe.

Up on the second floor of his house he had a contraption he showed off to me whenever I wanted another look at it. It was all metal and glass and I used to tell him it looked like one of those things in a horror movie. Hal called it an energy converter. It went up like an inverted funnel through the roof and connected with the thing that looked like a television antenna but wasn't.

Hal had a theory about thought waves. It didn't sound much crazier than

some of the stories these Down Easters tell and it was a deal more scientific. Hal said thought waves were electrical impulses which could be gathered from all over and stored up for future use. I don't recollect all the details but he said something about the thought waves being in bands and varying in strength,, depending on what was being thought about.

He had a metallic helmet connected to the machine. A fine net of copper wires covered the helmet. Hal said it gave him an inkling of what the world was thinking about. I suppose I could have tried it out if I'd wanted to, but I never asked and Hal never offered.

Hal said the strongest impression he got through the helmet was of food. The world was apparently a pretty hungry place. The next strongest was the money band. I guess we always knew people were greedy, but Hal claimed he was the first one to discover it scientifically.

There were a lot of other strong wavebands—vanity, love, death and so on. And way down the list, coming through pretty weak, was the Martian band, mixed up with some others.

Hal isolated it, finally, well enough to get something to work on but he couldn't entirely eliminate an undertone of weird murmurings that made no sense to him at all. He figured them out, after a while, but he got a shock doing it.

The way he explained it to me, in a gruff, take-it-or-leave-it way, was that people's thoughts *about* Martians were all mixed up with the thoughts *of* Martians.

Of the Martians themselves, that is.

This is all what Hal Parsons told me, before he vanished from among us. I'm just retelling it, not saying I believe it.

There's plenty of thinking about Mars these days, it being the nearest planet and those fellows down in Washington and Cocoa, Florida, fooling around with who knows what ideas—but this was thinking from the planet itself, apparently, carried across space and down along the antenna and into Hal's upside-down funnel.

Hal had this condenser thing attached to his machine and one night, after watching dials and making notes till he was foggy-headed, he left the machine running and went to bed.

He was pretty excited the next day. I was never sure whether he said he went to bed wearing that copper-wired helmet or whether he just had a nightmare. Anyhow he got impressions of Martians all night long—of tall Martians, small Martians, Martians on wheels, skinny Martians, finny Martians, Martians malign and benign, purple Martians, Martians that looked like people, Martians that looked like hell.

That was the way he put it, making it a kind of half joke but never cracking a smile.

Hal didn't let me stay long that day. He was too busy. He'd trapped some thoughts, he said. They'd been energized and were buzzing around in a scientific prison. The next step was to pick out a hunk of energy and materialize it.

He said something about never having liberated an impression before and that it might be dangerous. He said he was pretty sure he had a Martian (so to speak) in his trap and naturally he wanted to see what it looked like. And have a talk with it, if possible.

Then he shooed me out the door.

I took some customers out

on a cruise that afternoon and I was gone for a week. Out on the bay, under sail, Hal's fooling around seemed to be something pretty preposterous and I'd pretty much forgotten about it by the time I got back. Then, with the passengers ashore, the boat had to be made shipshape for the next batch, and it was another day before I rowed across the cove to Hal's house.

The house looked empty, somehow, before I even got to the door. It stood all alone out on the point with its antenna sticking up into the sky and when I knocked there was no answer. The door wasn't locked and I went in. Hal wasn't anywhere in the house.

I looked all through it, something making me save the top-floor workroom till last. That was empty, too, and quiet.

The big machine was smashed—not like you'd take a crowbar and bust something all up, but as if it had been sort of sucked together from inside and twisted. Some of the glass was broken and some of it had melted and hardened again into brittle puddles on the floor.

I couldn't find a body. Hal's bags were still there, and so was the big trunk he'd come

to Camden with years ago. His Sunday suit was hanging behind a door in his bedroom, a little in need of a pressing but nothing that would have kept him from wearing it to one of those science conferences he sometimes went to.

Finally I went back to the wrecked workroom among the litter in a big roll-top desk near a window overlooking the bay I found a notebook—a kind of journal, I guess. Most of it was in shorthand but toward the end of the written-in part there were several sentences in longhand.

Now Hal's handwriting, what I'd seen of it before, never was much and this writing in the notebook was worse, like he'd put down the words in a hurry with somebody joggling his elbow.

What it said was this, as nearly as I can recollect:

It said that Hal had caught himself a Martian, a real-in-the-flesh specimen, with his sky trap. It wasn't big by a long shot but it was plenty mad for its size, which was somewhere around seven inches tall. He didn't like being trapped one bit and as soon as they got the hang of each other's language the Martian let Hal know about it.

The creature—Hal didn't



describe it apart from the size—stayed mad, too, all through the two days he was there. He worked with Hal, or on him, in a kind of cold fury, the writings said, till they found a way to reverse Hal's sky trap.

Apparently the Martian wasn't satisfied with that. In the first place it wanted to be sure Hal wouldn't fool around with his contraption again—wouldn't go yanking him or his friends through space to a planet they didn't care for.

So the Martian arranged to smash the machine on his way back through it.

Then Hal was going to be changed into energy so he could go back with him.

He had committed a crime, you see, and when he got to Mars, Hal was going to go on trial for kidnaping.

That was all there was in the notebook except for a few more words that ended in a squiggle, as if Hal had been snatched away still holding his pen.

The words were, I think, "I'm going to need a good lawyer."

It sounds like Hal, anyway. If he ever comes back, I'll know he found one.

#### THE END



"Don't pay any attention, Fred. My wife dabbles in the occult."

# GAS !

By PAUL V. DALLAS

---

*It seemed everyone in town was getting mighty careless in handling their gas jets—leaving them turned on and asphyxiating themselves into kingdom come. But Tom McCormack thought something far more sinister than carelessness was involved and he planned to prove it—even if he had to kill Mayor Farrall in the process.*

---

THIS is Mayor Farrall speaking. This message comes to you as part of the current campaign aimed at eliminating the terrible tide of needless deaths caused by gas poisoning. Last night, fourteen people died in this city . . .”

The sound trucks were making their way throughout the city, blaring their message to the streets and buildings. The echoes swirled up the concrete canyons and the Mayor's words were carried by the wind down every side street and alley. Every hour on the hour the local radio and television stations broadcast excerpts from the same message, and the newspapers donated front-page space to the campaign. The reaction of the populace ranged from

complete cooperation—to the point of shutting off their gas completely and cooking on hot-plates—to annoyance at the repeated exhortations, and the conviction that this was all somehow a scheme cooked up in City Hall to guarantee the re-election of Mayor Farrall.

“ . . . making a total of fifty-six deaths from the careless handling of ordinary home gas for the week, and bringing the total since the epidemic came to public notice to seven hundred and twenty-three. Every one of these deaths—each and every one of them—was unnecessary! Fellow citizens, I urge you to exercise the greatest care . . .”

Tom McCormack walked over to the window and



Were the tiny fiends real, or were they  
spawned in his fevered mind?

closed it. He had heard the message many times by now, and he had absorbed it. He supposed it was a good piece of work. The number of casualties from gas poisoning had risen alarmingly over the last few months, and drastic measures were no doubt in order, to try to educate the people to the menace of improperly handled gas outlets. But Tom had checked his own gas range dutifully and everything was okay there, so now he had had enough. He didn't trust the radio to leave the subject unmentioned, so he turned, instead, to his record player. He loaded it with long-play platters and settled down. He had several hours' work to do on the books for the Kutrite Manufacturing Company, and wanted to be left alone . . . no messages.

At one o'clock in the morning, Tom closed his books, his task completed, had a glass of milk and went to bed. At three-thirty he awakened, choking. Gas!

The apartment was full of it. With leaden, fumbling motions, Tom threw back the covers and got groggily to his feet. He put his hand to his head and tried to grasp the situation, but he couldn't focus. He stood there, swaying,

thinking he was dreaming, knowing he was awake. Then with a mighty effort, he shook himself into action and in his bare feet stumbled his way into the kitchen. He groped for the light switch. The smell of gas was much stronger in here . . . overpowering, sickening, drawing him into the sticky, bottomless pool of nausea and unconsciousness. He paused, bent almost double, supporting himself on the door, and then brought his tired, burning eyes to bear on the stove. Of the five gas controls, three were turned full on.

Tom let go of the door and lurched toward the stove. His bare feet stepped in a wet spot by the sink, where a leaky connection had formed a slippery pool. They shot out from under him and he crashed, striking his head on the floor.

Tom McCormack would have died right there, except for the fact that his limp body skidded across the floor and he came to rest with his face pressing up against the back door. The flow of clear air that sighed under the crack filled his lungs and allowed the spark of life to linger.

He lay there while his bodily processes fought back,

trying to overcome the effect of the poison he had inhaled. His eyes were closed, and his breath was coming in shuddering gasps, when he became aware of voices in the room. He tried desperately to turn, to answer the voices, to thank them for coming to his rescue, but he could not bend his body to his will. So he lay quietly, suspended between sleep and action, and listened.

"That was very good, men. But not good enough. There were delays . . . and timing is the essence of this operation. The Third Squadron will have to intensify their drills. Now just take time out to familiarize yourself with your environment, but stay close to the vapor line. That will be all."

The voice faded and a general hubbub arose as the remaining voices discussed the exercise. There were high spirits and loud laughter as they called to one another across the room, jubilant over their success.

Suddenly a cry was raised. "Over here, quickly. It's Ramm. He has fallen into the water."

Shouts of dismay came to Tom's ears, and cries of alarm spread throughout the room. Then a sad quiet stifled the

noise, and in the stillness a lone voice spoke.

"He's dead. He was splashed all over with water and he died almost instantly. Men, this tragedy illustrates again how important it is to keep your guard up at all times. You must keep your head under all conditions, and remember that water and air can kill.

"Quickly, now, we must take his remains with us. Officers! Rally your men and sound the retreat."

In the ensuing commotion, orders were barked, sounds of scurrying bounced off the walls and, as the noise retreated, silence returned, broken only by the ugly hiss of escaping gas.

Tom's breathing grew deeper; he stirred as he pressed his face closer to the source of fresh air, Gulping desperately at the restoring oxygen, he tried to make sense of what he had heard, but in his dizziness, sense eluded him. He lay prone for several long moments; when he thought he had gathered sufficient strength, he took a final deep breath and held it, pressing his lips tightly together.

He got drunkenly to his feet and lurched toward the stove. Reaching it, he turned

the handles, shutting off the deadly fumes. The burning in his lungs spread through his body, saturating his being with nausea and sending his brain spinning. Knowing that his life depended on it, he forced his feet in the direction of the window and with his last reserve of strength, drew it open. He collapsed to his knees, letting his head rest on the windowsill. He knew he had saved himself. Gratefully he breathed in the cool early morning air, content to do nothing more.

Finally the sickness left Tom's stomach and his head steadied. New strength flooded through his limbs and he became conscious. He got to his feet; walking unsteadily, he made his way into the bedroom and opened the window. Then he flung himself on the bed and reviewed his close call. The one all-important point of which he was sure was that he had checked the stove before retiring, and it was turned off. He was certain of that. What could have happened to turn it on?

Still moving with great effort, he walked through the three rooms of his apartment, checking the windows and both front and rear doors. All the windows were closed and locked. Both doors were lock-

ed and their chains were in place. He went back to his bed and flopped on top of the covers, thinking.

As his mind wandered over the problem, he remembered with surprise the conversations he had heard while lying semi-conscious on the kitchen floor. His first thought was to dismiss the event as an hallucination, but as he probed the mystery deeper and more thoroughly, he realized that the most unlikely solution was the only one. Somehow or other, the control valves of his stove had been opened from the inside! Abruptly he sat up and reached for the phone on his night table.

He asked the operator for the night number of the gas company. After a long wait, a sleepy voice answered him.

"I hate to trouble you at this time," Tom began, "but this is urgent. Can you tell me, is it possible for the control valves to be turned on by a buildup of pressure within the gas pipe?"

"Is this an emergency?" the voice asked in a bored tone. "If it is you've gotta give me your name and address."

"No, no," Tom assured him. "It isn't that kind of emergency. I just want to know..."

"Look, Mac," the man said, "if it ain't an emergency, call back after nine o'clock. This is the number for night emergencies only."

"I know, I know," Tom pleaded with the man to stay on the phone, "only please, I've got to know just one thing. Can the gas pressure in the pipes build up so that it can force open the valve on a stove?"

"Why doncha sleep it off and quit bothering a working man?"

"I'm not drunk." Tom was desperate. "Please, mister, this is very important. Could the gas pressure . . ."

"Of course not!" the ear-phone roared at him. "The gas pressure don't get that high, and if it did, a pipe would bust or a connection would let go—but the valves don't turn on by themselves."

"You're sure of that? You're absolutely certain?"

"Aw, lay off, Mac, I told ya, didn't I? Gas don't turn on no valves by itself. Now go to sleep, will ya, bud, and if you have any more questions call after nine."

The click indicated that the night man had hung up, and Tom slowly replaced the receiver.

He was still sitting on the edge of his bed. Except for

an unpleasant feeling in the pit of his stomach, the effects of the gas had left him, and his normally acute mind raced around the problem, seeking a way into the heart of the enigma. Eliminating all the impossibles, he found himself left with the one answer which, improbable as it seemed, was the only remaining explanation. The longer he thought about it, the more convinced he became, and he continued to turn the thing over in his mind as he shaved and dressed. He knew he would have to act on his discovery.

When the custodian opened the doors of City Hall at nine o'clock, a citizen was waiting on the steps. It was Tom McCormack. He rushed into the cavernous building, consulted the directory and walked swiftly down the corridor leading to the Mayor's office. He was stopped at the outer office by several secretaries and a couple of guards, who were annoyed at him for interrupting their first order of business—the leisurely drinking of containered coffee.

One dowdy-looking woman gave him her attention.

"Yeah?" she asked.

"The Mayor," said Tom. "I want to see the Mayor."

"Yeah? Well, he isn't in."

"You'll have to come back," she answered, sipping her coffee.

"When will he be in?"

"I couldn't say."

Tom whipped out a notebook. "May I have your name, miss?" he asked; pencil poised.

"What do you want my name for?" she asked suspiciously, as she put down the container.

"I have to have a record of everyone I speak to, for the committee," he replied innocently.

"What committee?"

"The committee on the gas campaign," Tom answered. "Your name, please."

"Well, now, wait a minute," the secretary hedged. "Let me see what I can do. I'll be right back." She left him and went through a door at the rear. He waited, pleased that his little ruse had worked. With the gas campaign receiving such publicity, he had figured that no one at City Hall would want to buck a committee on the subject.

The woman came back and smiled at him. "Mayor Farrall is in his office, now," she said. "He'll see you. But just for a few minutes, you understand. He's very busy."

"Thanks," he said, following her into the Mayor's office.

Mayor Farrall sat at the big executive desk; he looked up as Tom walked in. The Mayor's face was a mixture of greeting and question.

Without waiting to be asked, Tom seated himself in the chair facing the city executive.

"Good morning, Mayor Farrall," he said. "I've come to see you on a matter of the utmost importance."

"Ah, yes, gas, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir, I believe I have found the answer to the recent wave of gas deaths."

The Mayor straightened up, brightening. "You have?" he said eagerly. "Well, what's the answer?"

"I'd like to give you a little background, Mayor, if I may."

"Yes, but please keep it brief. I'm quite familiar with the background, you know."

"I would just like to point out, sir, that there is no reasonable explanation for the fact that gas is being turned on unexpectedly, all over the city, killing people."

"Of course there is no reasonable explanation," Mayor Farrall said. "It's carelessness, just plain carelessness."

"No, sir, carelessness does not explain it at all. To begin with, seven hundred people don't suddenly get careless in



an ever-mounting pattern—and heaven only knows how many were affected before it was ever noticed that a pattern was developing.”

“All right, then,” the Mayor said, “what is your point? Defective equipment? We’ve checked the stoves in every apartment where a death occurred and they were all in perfect order. No, sir. Equipment is not the answer.”

“I agree with you, sir. The equipment is not to blame at all.”

“Well, then, what is your point?” the Mayor asked impatiently.

Tom drew a deep breath. “The valves are being opened from the inside, sir.”

If he expected the Mayor to react violently to the idea, he was disappointed. The man just looked at him as if he expected him to continue, and when he didn’t, the Mayor said, “Why, we know they’re being turned on from the inside. The people turn the damn things on inside their apartments—and carelessness does the rest.”

“I didn’t mean that, sir. I meant that something inside the gas pipes is turning on the valves.”

“How do you mean?” the

Mayor asked, regarding Tom with a fixed stare.

“I believe, sir, that there is life of some sort. A type of being that exists within the gas piping, who manages to turn the valve, releasing the gas into the rooms.”

“And just what do you think is their purpose in doing this?”

“In my opinion, they’re planning some sort of action against us, sir,” Tom answered. “I’m convinced that these sorties are merely rehearsals of the main attack—which may come at any time.”

Mayor Farrall leaned back and studied the young man.

“Do you,” he finally asked, “have any idea how we can thwart their plans?”

“Yes, sir, I do. As a matter of fact, I know that water, ordinary tap water, kills them! We could install water filters at the source and filter all the gas before it is piped to the homes and factories. That would kill them.”

“Ah, but you’ve overlooked the ones that are in the pipes now.”

“They could easily be taken care of,” Tom explained. “At a given time, all stoves all over the city must be turned off, and water run through the pipes. That would kill any that were in there—and from

then on, the filter would handle them."

"Just one more question," the Mayor said. "Have you any notion of how these, ah, creatures got into the lines?"

"I've given that a lot of thought, sir . . . I believe that the influx into the lines has something to do with the changeover from manufactured to natural gas. It was just about that time that these mishaps started occurring. I think that they live in the great wells of natural gas which are now being tapped for our supply."

"And how they got in the wells. You have a theory?" The Mayor's eyebrows teetered in the up position.

"Not exactly, although they might even have come from outer space. Many planets have atmospheres not unlike the natural gas we use. And if a form of life did exist on those planets, there might be some connection."

"I see," Mayor Farrall said. "Now tell me, what committee are you representing?"

Tom smiled. "Oh, that," he said. "To tell you the truth, I don't belong to any committee, sir; I just used that as a means of gaining admittance."

"In other words you are not

connected with any committee or organization at all, Mr. . . .?"

"Tom McCormack. That's right, I'm afraid—I really don't belong to any lodge, even."

"I see," the Mayor said. "And now you want me to pump water through all the gas lines in the city, and announce that I'm doing it to kill creatures from outer space that live in the pipes. That's what you want?"

"I admit it sounds implausible, Mr. Mayor, but you and I know that there can be no other explanation."

"Mr. McCormack, I shall make you a proposition."

"Yes, sir," Tom answered eagerly.

"When you leave this office, neither of us will mention this conversation again. We shall keep it quiet, you understand, as long as you give me your solemn word to seek competent psychiatric aid immediately."

"Psychiatric aid?" Tom said, stunned.

The Mayor nodded. "I imagine you are overwrought, young man. A sleepless night or two, perhaps. If I felt it was anything more serious than that, I would have you committed direct. Do you accept my proposition?"

"But, Mr. Mayor . . ." Tom protested.

"Yes or no?"

Tom gave up. "Yes, sir," he mumbled. "I'll do as you say."

"Good. Fine. And now, good day, sir. You'll be yourself again soon, believe me."

For the next few days, Tom plunged into his work. He took on more accounts than he normally handled, and in the secure world of books and pages and columns of figures, his experience with the gas creatures faded into the thick fuzziness of suppressed memory. When he did think of it, he found himself questioning whether it had ever happened. But in his conscious mind he never wavered. Under the circumstances, he dismissed the thoughts and buried himself in his work. He made one concession to his troubled mind. He devised tiny padlock-and-hasps arrangements, with which he locked each gas control handle individually. In order to turn the gas on in his stove, it was first necessary to use the keys, which he carried on him at all times. It could never be opened from the inside. The pilot light, he shut off altogether; he used matches, and felt safe.

After a particularly brutal

day, Tom sank into bed exhausted. He was not a dreamer, so he fell immediately into a deep, restoring sleep. The alarm clock was set to awaken him at six o'clock—but he awoke at three. He was suffocating! His breath tearing in agonized gasps through his gaping mouth. The room was heavy with gas.

He lay almost paralyzed from the effects of the poison seeping into his body through his lungs. His brain whirled, spinning, it seemed, through the room, spiralling up to the ceiling, brushing the floor, ricocheting off the walls. And soon it became aware of the voices.

"Now, that was fine, men. This operation points up the necessity for moving up our target date. Were it not for the excellent work done by the reconnoitering squad, we would not have been able to complete this night's assignment. Our leader feels that we are now ready for the push, and we must attack before the habit of outside locking becomes universal. This, then, will be the final exercise. Five days from today, we strike the final, overwhelming blow. This city will be the lead-off point, and you will have the privilege of starting the entire operation.

"Five days from today, all the natural gas available will be piped into the streets of this city, and we shall be able to overrun the entire area. We shall once again live on the surface, as we did on our beloved planet. Our lives below ground will be behind us, and we shall make this the sister planet to our own glorious home.

"Take a good look, men—this will be your last visit until the final assault. Officers! Rally your men. Sound the retreat."

The voices and the noises melted into the darkness, and Tom was left alone in the foul smelling room, lulled by the angry hiss of gas. He squirmed. Somewhere deep within his remaining consciousness he perceived a warning that he must act or die. He strained mightily to respond . . . but his arms and legs, made heavy through lack of oxygen, could not be budged.

Tom slipped backward into the pleasant reverie of near death. His chest was working convulsively now, though he was not aware of it. He started down the easy slope to complete, eternal sleep. Then with one tremendous gathering of his last remnant of strength, he jerked his arm out, grasped the alarm clock

and hurled it across the room. His last conscious memory was the happy sound of splintering glass, crashing musically onto the sidewalk below.

It worked. Beautiful, elusive Luck, which can stick like glue or vanish in the mountaintops, brought Patrolman Bennett under the window just as the clock came sailing through. Within seconds, Tom's door was broken in, and many hands brought succor. Patrolman Bennett found the gas outlet, high up on the bedroom wall, a long-disused fixture once used for gaslight, and turned it off. An inhalator squad sped through the empty streets, and soon Tom McCormack was in a hospital bed. He was drugged and put into an oxygen tent. He came out of it almost forty-eight hours later. The drugs had worn off; his lungs, washed with pure oxygen, were fresh and clean—and he was hungry.

It took him several hours to digest the fact that he had been laid up for almost two days, to remember what he had heard and to plan what he must do. He discarded immediately the idea of a straightforward approach. He had tried that once before—and he had almost died, as a

result. And this time, he was racing the clock. Three days. Seventy-two hours, in which to convince the authorities and put the water-flushing plan into effect. He called for his clothes, overrode the vigorous protests of the nurse, the doctor and the hospital staff, and checked himself out.

Tom went straight home. From one of the valises stored high on a closet shelf, he extracted a pistol. A German P-38—the officers' model—his only souvenir. He checked the clip. Eight snub-nosed, ugly bullets pressed upon each other. He inserted the clip, but left the firing chamber free. Then he went to City Hall.

There is a certain business-like, purposeful manner which gets things done, and, for the first time in his life, Tom had it. He brushed aside all queries and objections, and strode unannounced into the Mayor's office.

Mayor Farrall was at his desk.

"Oh, it's you again," he said, as he recognized his visitor. "Are you still worried about little men in your gas pipes?"

Tom looked uncomfortable. For a moment he hesitated and reviewed his plans. Then,

resigning himself to what he had to do, he said firmly, "Your Honor, I'm certain of what I told you before. There definitely *are* little men, or creatures of some sort, in the gas lines. I have also found out that we have very little time left before they launch their big push."

Mayor Farrall had had just about enough of this. He was a very busy man, and he did not intend to waste any time on crackpots.

"Now, look here, McCormack," he said impatiently, "in my opinion, you're a positive menace. In times like these, there's always someone who goes completely haywire and stirs up the public. Can you imagine what would happen, if your fantastic story were given to the press? Well, I'll tell you. Ninety percent of the people would laugh and enjoy the joke, but the other ten percent might take the thing seriously . . . and they could tie up the city's emergency system with a whole raft of false alarms. They would be seeing little men every time they made a cup of coffee or boiled an egg. I'm warning you, young man, that if I ever hear you telling that story again, anywhere, I'll have you put in a safe place,

where anything you say will be all right."

Tom shivered involuntarily. He detested violence, and he knew the enormity of what he was about to do . . . but the situation was so desperate that he felt any risk was worthwhile. He pulled the big, awkward pistol from his jacket pocket and pointed it at the dumbfounded Mayor.

"I'm sorry, Mayor Farrall, but you'll just have to listen." The gun centered unwaveringly on the man's chest. "At best, you have two days to live. If you don't do as I say, you will have less than two minutes. I am fully prepared to shoot you right here. At least that might attract attention to the terrible danger which is about to engulf the city.

"I want you to follow me and do exactly as I say."

When a loaded gun is suddenly pointed at a man by a desperate character who has just been giving every evidence of lunacy, the true test of that man's courage is at hand. To Mayor Farrall's credit, he did not flinch. Instead he tried to talk reasonably to the young man.

"Look here, McCormack," he said. "This sort of thing won't help. Maybe I didn't

realize how seriously you took this thing . . . but if you're really this earnest about it, maybe we can talk the whole problem over and arrive at some solution."

The gun pointed steadily at the Mayor's chest.

"It's too late for that, your Honor," Tom said. "I would never have gone this far, if I weren't prepared to see it through all the way. I know what's on your mind, and I can understand that you'd think you were doing your duty if you tried to have me arrested. But if you do, I'll shoot you down. Remember that, please, Mayor, because if I have to shoot you, I'll be very sorry, but I'll shoot. It has to be this way."

The Mayor placed both his hands on the surface of the desk. There was no use taking chances that this young man might pull the trigger by mistake.

"All right," he said. "What do you want me to do?"

"We are going over to my place," Tom answered him. "I'm going to prove to you once and for all that I am not crazy."

"This is an odd sort of a way to go about proving a point like that," Mayor Farrall observed. Then as he saw the glint in Tom's face, he

added hastily, "But I'll come with you, if you say so."

"Good. Now we'll leave together." Tom placed his hat over the hand holding the automatic. "I shall be right behind you, or at your side, so I needn't warn you not to try anything. Even if they jump me, you'll never know it. A bullet in the spine paralyzes if it doesn't kill. Remember that, as we go."

"Of course, of course." The Mayor was perspiring. "But what will I tell them? After all, I have several important appointments this morning, and if I just walk out on them . . ." He spread his hands. He felt it best to stall. The longer this madman stayed, the better the chance that something would happen to defeat him.

"That'll be your worry, Mayor. I won't tell you what to do or what to say. Just remember that if you say the wrong thing, it'll be your own problem. Now let's go." The hand covered by the hat waved towards the door.

The Mayor stood up and as he did, his hand moved imperceptibly to the button hidden under the overhang of his desk. A public official must have some sort of protection against the cranks

who every now and then slipped by the protective screening. The button sounded a buzzer in the room of the police captain stationed at City Hall. It was all worked out in advance. The police didn't just come running and bursting into the Mayor's office. . . . The emergency signal could mean anything. Might even be a madman with a gun, who would start shooting at the slightest upset.

When Mayor Farrall left his office, with Tom McCormack right at his heels, he mumbled a few words to his secretary. He was just going out for a few minutes, he advised her—would she just hold up his schedule, and he would be back shortly. Everything went smoothly.

Outside, Tom hailed a cab, and both men got in. Tom, still holding the gun trained on the Mayor, gave the driver his address, and they settled back. Neither of them saw the black sedan that pulled away from the curb in back of them and slid into place behind the taxi.

When they got to Tom's apartment, he handed the driver two bills and told him to keep the change. The Mayor got out first and Tom followed with the hat. And the gun. They walked up the

stone steps of the apartment building and went inside. As they passed through the door, the black sedan drew silently up to the curb and five serious-looking men got out.

Tom unlocked his door and let the Mayor in. Mayor Farrall looked about him. There was nothing about the tidy orderliness of the place to indicate an unbalanced mind. But that didn't mean much. The man with him lived here, and there was no question about it . . . he was a madman. The Mayor hoped his signal had worked; he had no way of knowing.

For his part, Tom wasted no time. Leading the Mayor into the kitchen, he seated him in a chair. He opened a kitchen drawer and drew out the cord he had placed there earlier; with this, he bound Mayor Farrall tightly and expertly to the chair. He swung it around so that the Mayor faced the stove. Then he pulled the key from his pocket.

"You'll notice, sir," he said, "that all these controls are locked. That's to prevent their being opened from the inside."

"By the little men?"

"That's right. Now I'm going to unlock them and open the valves; this will release

the gas and, if my theory is correct, the creatures will come right out with it and you will hear them."

Mayor Farrall strained at the cords, the first real stages of panic beginning to take hold of him.

"But see here, McCormack, if you open the gas, we'll both be killed. You can see that, can't you?" he pleaded. "The only way to settle this is scientifically. We can have the gas analyzed, and then your theories can be proved conclusively."

"Not a chance," Tom said, shaking his head and turning on the gas. "You know yourself how much you wanted to test the gas when I first came into your office. You wanted to have me locked up. Well, the only way is to let you see for yourself . . . then you'll see that action is taken. Without a second's delay."

The pungent smell of the escaping gas spread through the room, and the Mayor coughed. Perspiration was streaming down his face as he struggled vainly to get loose.

"Take it easy, Mayor. I'm going to leave you alone in here and close the door. I'll be back when you've had time to hear the creatures. Don't worry, I won't let you suffo-



cate." With that, Tom left the room.

But the Mayor worried. The room was rapidly filling with the poison.

As Tom reached the living room, he put the gun in his pocket and was about to sit down when there was a pounding on the front door.

"We know you're in there, McCormack," someone shouted through, "and we know you've got Mayor Farrall with you. Now we'll give you just two minutes to open the door and come out with your hands up. You haven't got a chance, McCormack. The place is surrounded, so come on out."

Tom swallowed hard. He jumped to his feet, pulling the gun out of his pocket. He flattened himself against the wall, just to one side of the door. He had to see this through—nothing could interfere with his plans now. Just a few more minutes! Already the smell of gas, seeping under the kitchen door, told him that the Mayor was going to be hearing the creatures any minute now. He cleared his throat and made his voice tough.

"Listen, you!" he snarled. "I've got the Mayor right here with me. If you make a move to break in, I'll kill him. In

five minutes, I'll open the door and you can all come in... but if you try anything before that, you'll have a dead Mayor on your hands. Get me?"

The voice through the door became soothing.

"Now, son. You don't want no trouble. Why don't you just open the door, and we won't say anything more about it, huh?"

"You heard what I said," Tom answered, keeping his tone grating, rough. "One move out of you guys and I blow off the top of his head. Now go away, and come back in five minutes."

Tom sensed rather than heard the noise at the window and whirled around to see it crash inward as a man leaped through, charging at him, low, like a fullback. Another man followed, and then another. He was hit hard and fell, crushed against the floor and the wall. As the heavy bodies of the two men blotted out light and sound, the door splintered and fell to the floor. He heard shouts and running feet. Then the bodies lifted themselves off him, and he was being pulled to his feet.

He got his wind back, and saw the men in the kitchen. They had opened the windows

and turned off the gas. The two men who held him had his arms twisted behind him, and now one of them whipped out a pair of handcuffs and in one practiced move applied them to his wrists.

They had unbound the Mayor now and were carrying him, still in the chair, in from the kitchen. The man was barely conscious, his head was swaying gently to and fro and his body sagged limply in the chair. They set him down in the middle of the living room, and one detective started fanning him with a magazine from the table.

One man detached himself from the group and walked up to Tom, who had been witnessing the scene with mixed feelings of rage, despair and frustration.

"Okay, bub, you'll come along with us. Kidnapping and attempted homicide."

The man grasped Tom's arm and swung him around. They started out the door together, but were stopped by a loud spluttering; Mayor Farrall, coming to, was alternately coughing his lungs out and trying to bellow something.

"That boy," the Mayor panted, heaving and pointing a finger at Tom, "hold him!"

"Yes, sir," the detective an-

swered. "We're taking him to headquarters."

A paroxysm of coughing shook the Mayor . . . his eyes were running. "No, no," he managed to gasp. "Hold him here. Take those handcuffs off him."

He was getting back to normal now, although his eyes were still watery and he was breathing hard. "We've got work to do." He turned to one of the other men. "Jim," he said, "get the Commissioner of Water Supply and Gas down to my office."

Tom's eyes widened. "You heard them, sir?"

"Yes, son, I heard them." The Mayor attempted a weak smile. "I guess there was no other way you could do it."

Tom relaxed. "And I'm really sorry about . . ."

"Forget it, son. But tell me one thing. You're sure that water kills them?"

"Yes, sir. I remember when one of them slipped and fell into a puddle . . ."

The Mayor silenced him with an upraised hand. "That's good enough. I'll take your word for it."

The group of hardened men looked blankly from one another to Mayor Farrall and then to Tom. They were perplexed. But Tom McCormack was grinning happily. **THE END**

---

*Doctor Keller was sure he'd found a serum that would restore life. Only one trouble: The serum seemed to be as invisible as life itself.*

---

# DARK MIRACLE

By IVAR JORGENSEN

DR. KELLER?"

The short, plump man continued down the hospital corridor, completely oblivious of the smart, white-clad nurse hurrying to catch up with him.

"Dr. Keller?" She caught up with him and tugged gently at his sleeve.

He stopped short and looked into her face, not comprehending.

"You are Doctor Nikita Keller, aren't you?" the nurse said.

"Yes. Yes, of course," the little man answered. "What do you want?" He had been in deep thought and was irritated at having his concentration broken.

The nurse smiled professionally. "Dr. Welles would like to see you, Dr. Keller;

would you mind stepping into his office? It's right this way."

She started down the hall and led the way to a mahogany door on which, in neat gold letters, the words "Doctor V. Welles" were followed on the line below by "Chief Psychiatrist." She knocked lightly on the door and, without waiting for an answer, opened it and announced, "This is Dr. Keller, Dr. Welles." Before either of the men could say anything, she swept out of the door, closing it behind her.

The little man stood in the center of the room, bewildered by the quick pace that had snatched him from the shelter of his meditations and deposited him in this office for no reason that he could grasp.

Dr. Welles got to his feet and came round the desk to shake hands. "Ah, Dr. Keller," he said heartily. "Please sit down. This is nothing serious. I just want to have a little chat with you."

Dr. Keller sat down as bidden. "About my wife, I suppose," he muttered.

"Only indirectly," Dr. Welles answered, resuming his seat behind the desk. He rested his elbows on the table and placed his fingertips together. "Specifically, I want to talk about you."

"About me?" The little man's eyebrows shot up, surprised.

"Yes, Doctor. Now to begin with, do I understand correctly that you are not a doctor of medicine?"

"Yes, that's right," Dr. Keller said. "I'm a bio-chemist."

"Quite," the chief psychiatrist nodded. "And you've naturally been terribly upset by your wife's accident."

"It was as much my accident as hers," Dr. Keller said, clenching his fists. "True, it happened to her, but if I hadn't let her drive the car . . . if I had been driving, she would be a whole woman today. She would still have both her arms, instead of be-

ing crippled, and . . ." he buried his face in his hands and shook his head helplessly.

"That's one of the points I want to discuss with you, Keller," Dr. Welles said evenly. "Blaming yourself for an accident which occurred through no fault of your own won't help either your wife or you. At the moment, Mrs. Keller's basic attitude is the greatest hindrance to her recovery. She just simply does not want to live. She regards herself as a cripple, of no use to anyone, and she doesn't want to go on."

Dr. Keller's head snapped up, his eyes blazing. "Well, would you?" he shouted. "What would your basic attitude be? How would you like to be the original even-tempered one-armed psychiatrist?" He buried his face again and sobbed briefly. Gradually he regained control and looked up, "I'm sorry, Doctor," he said, "but I've been under a strain. I hope you'll forgive me."

"I understand completely," Dr. Welles sympathized. "But you see, your frame of mind naturally affects your wife's. Now there are stories going about that the ordeal of this tragedy has, well, shall we say, caused you to lose sight



He exploded into a frenzy, venting his rage on the unoffending laboratory.

of reality. Set you off on a course which is unrealistic."

"These stories, Doctor," Keller looked unwaveringly into Dr. Welles' eyes, "they add up to the fact that maybe I'm crazy, is that it?"

"No, no. Not crazy at all." The chief psychiatrist smiled placatingly. "Let us just say that momentarily . . ."

"Momentarily I'm out of my mind," Keller broke in calmly. "You can come right out and say it, Doctor. I won't be offended. I know what I'm doing."

"Well, let me ask you directly, Dr. Keller—you are conducting some experiments, aren't you?"

"Oh, so that's it," Keller said. He took a deep breath. "Yes, I'm conducting some experiments. Now surely, Doctor, it can hardly seem unusual to you for a biochemist, and an organic chemist, too, I might add, to conduct experiments."

"No, of course not. But there is something unusual about the experiments themselves, isn't there, Doctor? Or is my information incorrect?"

"I should assume your information is accurate," Keller returned.

"Would you care to tell me about them?"

"Since you already seem to know as much about my work as I do, I might just as well. But first let me point out that if an experiment, any experiment, were not headed in an entirely new direction, there would be no point to it in the first place."

Dr. Welles nodded his agreement.

Keller hesitated a moment, then continued, "The fact of the matter is that I am attempting to find a method of growing new parts, at will, within a living body."

"Specifically, the regeneration of an arm. A woman's arm on a human body." Dr. Welles came right to the point.

"Not regeneration, Doctor. A completely new growth is what I seek," Keller corrected him.

Dr. Welles leaned back. "Before we go any further, Dr. Keller," he said, "I'd like to point out that I have a very high regard for your work. If memory serves me correctly, your father, Vladimir Keller, worked with Pavlov in Russia. He participated in the tests with the dog's head, where it was kept alive although completely severed from the body. Much valuable information on conditioned

reflex came from that work. In your own field, you enjoy an enviable reputation, and I have the utmost respect for your integrity and ability. I want you to understand that it is against this background that I speak to you now."

"Thank you for the bouquets." Keller half-smiled uncomfortably. "But I don't see what all that has to do with this interview."

"Simply this, old man," Dr. Welles said pleasantly, "I think you're barking up the wrong tree. Instead of trying to fight an unhappy situation with weapons that just aren't available, why not try to accept the thing and learn to live with it? Don't you see, your love for your wife isn't diminished by her loss of the arm; try to show her that, and she will come to accept life under slightly changed conditions. The big thing to her is your love. And that she still has."

Keller's face hardened. He sat for a moment in silence, and when he spoke his words were low and earnest. "Vera wants her arm," he said, "and I am going to give it to her."

"But my dear fellow," Dr. Welles protested. "How?"

"Sometimes I lose patience with you professional men,"

Keller said, without malice. "The very quarter where my work should receive its greatest encouragement produces the greatest resistance. Now look here, would you be startled if I told you that eye-cells grafted onto the abdomens of embryonic fruitflies produced full-fledged eyes on the adult fly's stomach?"

"Why, no, of course not," Dr. Welles said, "but that's all been done. It's pretty well established."

"In heaven's name, it had to start *somewhere!*" Keller almost lost his patience. "An arm cell, taken from an embryo, planted in the correct position, could be made to grow into an arm. It would take time, but I say it can be done."

"This sort of thing is not in my field at all," Dr. Welles said, feeling that he was being outmaneuvered, "but I just don't see how it could be done. What would nourish the cell, for instance? It couldn't expect to draw on the host body for the tremendous growth that would be required."

"Aha!" Keller jumped to his feet, his eyes sparkling. "It is precisely in this area that I am concentrating my study. I am developing a chemical aggregate that I

shall call the life-serum. It will itself be a life force and thus capable of nourishing the cell I shall have transplanted."

Dr. Welles sagged in his chair. The interview had gotten completely out of hand. "Do you mean to suggest," he asked, "that this serum which you create will be alive?"

"Exactly," Keller said triumphantly, spreading his hands. "So you see, it is not so crazy after all."

Dr. Welles floundered. "But Great Scott, man," he finally said, "how can you hope to create, in a serum, a life which doesn't already exist?"

"How?" Keller returned the question. "Like this, Doctor:" then, ticking them off on his fingers as he went, he said, "You take water, salts, minerals, carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, of course, and nitrogen, phosphorus, sulphur and nucleic acids. Porphyrin derivatives . . ."

"Enough, enough," Dr. Welles cried, holding up his hands. "I can't argue with you in your own field, Dr. Keller. But don't you see that the thing's impossible? Believe me, the best thing for you and Mrs. Keller, is to accept the unavoidable and adjust to it. Think it over, old man."

"I have thought it over," Keller replied with a faint smile, "and you believe me—Vera will have her arm." He moved to the door and, pausing with his hand on the knob, he half-turned toward the desk. "And, Doctor," he added lightly, "if I may give you a piece of advice, although you may find it difficult, try to accept the unavoidable and adjust to it." With a friendly wink at the completely staggered psychiatrist, Keller left the room.

The first two alarm clocks failed to rouse him, but as the third was nearing the end of its ring, Keller groaned, stirred and rolled over. He fumbled for the clock and reached it just as it had rung itself out.

Sleepily, he sat up and surveyed the room. The door between his bedroom and his laboratory was ajar, and it was hard to tell where one room ended and the other started. Half-empty flasks and test-tubes were scattered on any available space in both rooms; some were delicately balanced on great teetering mounds of formula paper, others were on the floor. Between his long daily visits to the hospital and his continuous figuring, formulating and



testing, Keller had no time for housekeeping — barely enough for sleep. Hence the three alarms.

Disregarding the complaints of his still-weary body, he lurched to his feet and stumbled across the room. He put a blackened coffeepot on a Bunsen burner and then drew a little soap and water across his face at the sink. Gulping down the stale, acid coffee as he dressed, Keller was ready to face the day.

Slowly, almost reverently, he entered the laboratory and looked around. One corner of the large bench at the far wall stood out. An area of two square feet had been cleared of the debris which cluttered every other inch of table and shelf space. A clean piece of white paper covered the cleared surface, and in the center a large wired glass dome enclosed a dish. Keller never glanced in its direction. Instead, deliberately, he wandered through the room, adjusting the position of a flask, picking up a test-tube and glancing at its contents against the light. Anything to keep away from the glass dome until he had built up his courage. Morning after morning had started this way, and every time the dome had

given him failure. Dead, inert serum greeted him every morning, making each day a bedlam of refiguring, reformulating and finally retesting. Time was draining away with each washing down of a dead serum. Vera was slipping closer to the level of non-existence. As Dr. Welles constantly reminded him, it was not so much that she would die as that she would cease to live.

And so, as he had come to dread each morning's findings, Keller had evolved a routine of ignoring the important corner, under the guise of tidying up. His actions were pathetic. He had to end up in the same place, and soon, having whipped himself almost to a frenzy of expectancy, he arrived in front of the dome.

Casually, he switched on the overhead lamp and peered through the glass.

He couldn't believe it! Squinting, he pressed his forehead against the dome, striving to understand. He tore the dome off and looked directly into the dish. It was empty! This morning yielded not just dead serum—but no trace of serum at all. The dish was dry and empty.

Keller reeled to a stool and sat heavily, clutching at the

tabletop for support. Several flasks crashed to the floor and splintered, but he ignored them. Could Dr. Welles be right? Was he losing his mind? He took hold of his spinning thoughts and approached the problem as a scientist. There was one of two possibilities; it was up to him to determine which was the probability. He had either suffered a complete mental blackout and had completed no experiment last night—or he had gone through with it and, during his sleep, he had destroyed every evidence of it.

Was it possible, he asked himself, that the power at the center of his importance really did not wish Vera to survive? Was his subconscious taking over and directing the ruination of his experiments? Or was it nothing so sinister; a simple case of overwork? Distraught, perplexed, he rushed into the street and inquired of two startled passers-by as to the date and time of day. Reassured that he had not blacked out for an extended period, he proceeded to go over the previous day and evening in his mind. Nothing seemed out of order. As far as he could tell, everything fell into place as part

of his normal overworked schedule.

All right, then, he decided, since he could not find the flaw, he would dismiss it. After all, a few hours of confusion could be absorbed into the general scheme of things without upsetting the basic plan.

That afternoon he did not visit Vera. Instead, he was busy in his laboratory reworking the experiment of yesterday. With infinite precision he went through the steps, writing everything carefully on fresh paper. He scrupulously made notes on even the elementary steps he knew by heart. When he was finished, he put the dish containing the serum under the glass dome and connected the wires. It was past midnight and the exacting work and lack of nourishment had taken their toll. He was haggard; tired beyond feeling. But he had a sense of accomplishment. He had, he knew, made up for the lapse of mind he had suffered the previous day. He was tired but satisfied. Without undressing, without food or drink, he stumbled to his bed and slept.

The eager anticipation with which Keller looked forward to the inspection of the serum dish next morning

fought a battle with the utter weariness of his body and won a victory at ten o'clock. His eyes flashed open and he was awake in an instant. Out of bed, slippers and bathrobe ignored, he dashed into the lab room. No pretense at tidying this time . . . no delay. Straight to the glass dome he went and lifted it up.

He stared at the dish in silence and without motion, then he blinked his eyes and checked his vision. Once again it was completely empty. He stood there, stunned. Hastily he checked his notes, making sure that they were undisturbed, and verified his memory. Quickly pulling trousers and jacket on over his pajamas, he checked in the street to make sure that the date and time coincided with his belief. Having ascertained that there had been no loss of time involved in his failure, he set about making new plans.

The next few days passed in a blur of almost continuous activity. He called the hospital and learned that Vera had passed into a coma; he asked them to notify him at home of any developments and kept at work. He checked over the phone with Dr. Welles and asked, in guarded words, if it were possible for

a man to destroy, in his sleep, the product of his labors while awake. The answer confirmed his opinion, and he set about devising every sort of trap to catch himself.

From the depths of memory, he dredged up various methods of inhibiting sleepwalking. He tried them all, and none of them worked. The strain, the intolerable eating habits and the constant defeat wore his nerves to a transparency. In desperation, he surrounded his bed at night with carpet tacks. Starting at the outer perimeter, he worked his way carefully toward the bed, placing each tack in its position, point upward. From the wall, around the bed, to the other wall, a semi-circle of bristling points, three feet wide, formed an impassable barrier to bare feet. Sitting in bed, he surveyed the scene and nodded approvingly to himself. His awakening might be painful, but he would not leave his bed this night without knowing it.

In the morning, Keller's first act was to examine his protective screen; to his great relief, he found it intact. He put on his slippers and, using his pillow as a broom, swept a path clear. Shuffling with

amazing speed in his floppy slippers, he went directly to the all-important glass dome. Without bothering to look through, he lifted it off and stared. An oath ripped from his lips, as he flung the dome at the wall, splintering it. The infernal dish was empty. He rested a haunch on the stool and passed a shaking hand over his brow. He was completely, utterly defeated now, and he knew it. He would have to give himself over to Dr. Welles. And in the meantime, Vera, Vera who meant so much to him, the only one who made his own life worth living, would die because his mind had failed him. His inner consciousness had betrayed him.

The great blanket of despair which had settled on him was pierced by the shrill ringing of the phone. He heard it on the fourth ring and searched for the instrument. He found it beneath a large sheaf of papers. Mechanically, he lifted it to his ear.

"Hello," he said blankly.

"Doctor Keller?"

"Yes."

"Dr. Keller, this is Dr. Welles."

"Yes."

"Look here, this is Dr. Kel-

ler, isn't it?" The voice sounded puzzled.

"What? Oh, yes, yes, Dr. Welles, I understand. My mind was elsewhere when I answered. What is it, Doctor?"

"I'm afraid I have bad news for you," Dr. Welles said. His voice was coming over in the too calm, professional manner which presages tragedy.

"Vera," Keller moaned. "Is she worse?"

"She . . . slipped away from us during the night, Dr. Keller. The nurse thought she was asleep."

"Slipped away from you? I don't understand." Keller could hardly concentrate. "Where did she go?"

"What I'm trying to say, Doctor, is that she's dead. She went peacefully and without pain. The hospital would like to know what arrangements you wish . . ."

The conversation continued, but it was a monologue, the words pouring senselessly from the earpiece that dangled from Keller's limp hand. Then a terrible fury gripped the dazed, hurt mind, and he slammed the receiver back into place, and grabbing flasks, books and chunks of minerals, he hurled them about the room destroying,

breaking, wreaking damage wherever he could.

The small cages which housed his guinea pigs were dashed to the floor, crushing and maiming the little animals. For an hour the rampage continued, the awful pent-up emotions of the past several weeks suddenly spilling the dam and flooding the area around the heartbroken scientist. And then the flood subsided, and a deep unnatural calm settled in the room, as Keller stood slackly before the fresh white paper and the dish which alone had escaped the raging force of his temper.

He stared at the dish, not seeing it. Not seeing anything. Not thinking anything. Unhurriedly, consciousness returned to him and pulled him gently back toward awareness. He looked around his littered laboratory. He knew what had happened and did not regret what he had done. There was nothing, at the moment, about which he cared.

At his feet, he noticed the soft, dead body of a guinea-pig that had fallen into sudden death. He picked it up idly and fondled it—not for what it was or what he had done to it, but because at the

moment he felt the need for gentleness. He stroked the smooth fur, fingering and petting it. Then he laid it tenderly in the dish on the fresh white paper.

He looked at it, lying so still in the dish. He did not see it as a guinea-pig, but as the thing which had accepted his gentleness. His eyes narrowed, then he blinked rapidly and squinted. He leaned forward, staring. The forefoot of the little animal was twitching, almost imperceptibly. A terrible doubt crossed Keller's mind. Was this hallucination? The guinea pig answered this question decisively. With a sudden movement, it drew its legs up under it and, looking around it with jerky motions, it scampered out of the shallow dish and down the bench, clambering over the debris.

For a moment Keller stood there. Just for a moment. The impossible idea split open his mind, entered and took hold. The animal had been brought back to life. No, no, it had been *given* life. That was it! The serum was there. It had been there all the time. But of course, what a fool he had been! What had he been expecting? He had created a life force. It had evolved from the serum. But a life force in it-

self would be invisible. What is there to death that one can see? Only the result of life is visible. He had held life itself in his dish for the last few days.

Swiftly, he checked his theory. He looked around and found another dead guinea pig. He examined it carefully for signs of life; there were none. To be sure, he picked up a syringe which held a long, hollow needle. Using the skill of long practice, he deftly inserted the needle into the animal's breast and pierced the heart. This guinea pig was dead. There could be no doubt about it.

Carefully, with hands that were trembling, he placed the silky body in the dish and waited. Long minutes appeared, hovered over him and dissolved to make way for minutes still to come. Perspiration washed his forehead and his mouth was dry. As he watched in grinding concentration, within his whole world—which was Vera, his wife and companion—there existed only himself and this guinea pig.

At last, like the eruption of a gigantic volcano, a foot twitched. A tremor passed over the tiny body, and then the legs were drawn up under the animal as life coursed

through the animal and occupied it. Soon the greased pig became completely rejuvenated.

Dr. Keller acted without hesitation. He picked up the phone and dialed a number. After a mercifully short wait he said, "Hello, Dr. Welles?"

"Yes. Ah, this is Dr. Keller?" The voice was poised, confident.

"Yes, it is," he answered, fighting to control his own voice and filter out the tumbling excitement. "You wanted to know my wishes as to the arrangements?"

"If you're sure you feel up to it, old man," Dr. Welles said soothingly. "If not, I could . . ."

"I'm up to it all right," Keller said, almost jovially. "You can just bet the whole damn world I'm up to it. I want the body sent here immediately. By ambulance."

"To your place?" Dr. Welles sounded surprised. "Well, I don't know . . . look here, can I help at all? I mean, don't you think it would be better if . . ."

Keller interrupted him. "You do not question my competency to decide in this matter, do you, Doctor?" he asked, his tone achieving just the right degree of hardness.

"Not at all, old chap, not at

all," Dr. Welles reassured him. "It's just that . . ."

"Good," Keller leapt into the breach. "Then you have her sent over immediately by ambulance. I'll pay all charges. And, Doctor, come by tomorrow in the morning some time, and take a look at her."

"All right, Dr. Keller,"

Dr. Welles sighed resignedly. "I'll see that the body is sent directly over to you. I'll stop by tomorrow."

"Thank you very much," Keller said, and hung up abruptly. He took a deep breath and started clearing the place at once. He had a lot of work to do. And he had so little time.

**THE END**



"Joan is a firm believer in realism."

# HEADS YOU LOSE

By GERALD VANCE

---

*There was this dame with two heads, see? And she came to see this doctor; wanted to talk about her love life. What followed makes the average murder mystery dull as day-old dishwater. Judge for yourself.*

---

THE lady with the two heads really wasn't bad looking once you got accustomed to her.

She had been sitting across my desk from me for some fifteen minutes. I went out and told my office nurse, Jan Marston, to go home "and as soon as I can get rid of that two-headed woman, I'll check my hospital patients."

"Sure, two-headed woman," she flipped back. "If you could conjure up a woman who had a double supply of anything—it wouldn't be heads." She patted me on the cheek, kissed the tip of my nose and walked away, bouncing her pretty little—well, bouncing out the door.

The head on the left was the talkative one. She explained, softly, that the rea-

son the nurse had not seen her was that she had materialized inside my office. "I frighten people," she said.

"Of course you do," I told her in my best bedside manner. "But it is only because you are plural from the neck up, not because you are unattractive. As a matter of fact," I went on, taking in her figure and the trim legs pertly crossed, "you are quite beautiful. Both of you."

"I am singular," she said. "Don't forget that."

I decided to forget it and said, "If I am going to help you, please don't joke with me about materializing."

The face on the left smiled. "Have it your way. The next thing you will tell me is that I have only one head."

"You have two, all right.





"If you want my opinion, you kiss like a slob!"

But it is merely rare. Not impossible. Animals have been known to be born with two heads many times. In the case of the lower classes of animals—snakes for example—it happens quite often as compared to animals of higher classification like humans. Or a little less in the strata. Double-headed calves are rare, but I have seen one. They die rather young.”

“I am four hundred and thirty-nine years old,” the left side said. She made it sound like the most natural thing in the world.

I smiled and decided to go along with her. “You don’t look a day over twenty-two.” I went to her side and offered her a cigarette, and as she took it I watched closely to see which pair of lips would wind up with it.

The left side said, “My people settled in what is now Kentucky, hundreds of years ago. There, on Shadee Mountain I was born. There we still live, some seventy-five of us. The mountain is quite secluded. No one lives there but us.”

“So I imagine.”

“What did you say?”

“I said I suppose your mother and father and brothers and sisters and cousins

and so on all have two heads?”

“Precisely.” She snubbed out the cigarette and recrossed her legs.

“Forgetting the age factor, I’ll point out where you’re wrong,” I told her.

“The age factor is easy.” The words still came from the one on the left. “We practice the old religion. Our life expectancy is one thousand years on the average.”

I wondered what the old religion was but there were other more important things. “What is your name or names?”

The left side again gave me the friendly smile. “I’m Noreen.”

“Who’s the other one?”

“She’s me. Noreen.”

“That won’t work,” I said. “You act independently. As far as I’m concerned, she’s Nadeen.”

She gave me the smile again. “She’s still Noreen. But I won’t argue with you.”

“But, listen,” I continued. “You’re all wrong because there is no reason for a race of two-headed persons. I’m a physician and an amateur anthropologist.”

The lady leaned forward and allowed the neck of the soft wool dress she wore to fall open. From the neck

down, she was normal. She was lush and firm and pink. "There is no *reason* for blue eyes as opposed to brown eyes," she replied. "There is no reason for curly hair as opposed to straight. There is no reason for left handedness. There is no *reason* for persons with double heads. Yet we do exist. My great-grandfather and grandmother were the first. They were brother and sister but they married as it seemed logical. They lived on what is now called the Island of Hawaii and were kicked out for breaking the moral code. They went east in a war canoe. With plenty of food, good winds and the help of Tao, they landed on what is now the coast of California.

"Pursued by Indians, they crossed the great desert of Arizona. They crossed the plains country of Kansas and the Mississippi River. They found a haven on Shadee Mountain and there we were born and have lived."

"And learned to materialize?" I asked, still not believing.

Both heads nodded. "Learned is the exact word," said the lady on the left. "We learned it to survive. In the early days the Indians pursued us. We found that we

frightened them just as we frighten the present day people. So like a chameleon learns to blend his color to the background, we learned to be invisible. We also learned the art of self-teleportation. We travel in an instant. We came from Kentucky to your office in a fraction of a second."

It was growing late. While she—they—sat there I called the hospital and had a resident physician check on my patients. I turned back to the lady. "I'm afraid I can guess why you have come to see me."

"Yes," she said with a note of sadness. "I want you to remove one of my heads. I want to leave the mountain forever. I want to live a normal life."

"You won't be able to live a normal life if you expect to remain on earth for six hundred more years," I told her. "That would be too hard to explain."

"I will quit the old religion," she said softly. "I will marry. I will have normal children. I will live forty or fifty more years with the man I love and then I will die with him. I will die with him sooner if I must."

"You will go live with the

man you love," I echoed. "Does he, too, have—" I cut it off. Those words "two heads" sounded too much like a joke I once heard. "Is he one of your clan?"

"No," she said. "You."

I jumped to my feet, and headed for the liquor cabinet. I poured myself a stiff one and downed it. I said, "Preposterous. I've never seen you before in my life."

"I've watched you many times," said the lady on the left. Her words were so gentle, so full of worship that I turned, startled. I saw a look in the eyes of the left side. The woman was truly in love with me! I poured another drink, downed it. I asked if she'd have one. They both declined.

Noreen said, "I have been to your home. I have sat by your side. I have enjoyed your happinesses and hated your sorrows." Her eyes glanced downward. "I have lain by your side at night."

I shook my head, not believing. Then I was caught by the eyes on the right. They flashed. They shot a lightning bolt at me.

"What's wrong?"

For the first time the right side spoke. "I hate you," it said. "I expect to kill you. Some night when you're

asleep, I'll cut your throat."

The left side began sobbing as the right side went on.

"I'm in love too. With a boy on the mountain. A boy of my own kind. I've lain with him, too, and I was visible and he was awake. That is a real love, doctor. That is why I'll kill you. I won't give him up."

"Well," I said, somewhat unnerved. "If I perform this operation, there's no question in my mind as to which head gets the knife."

There was silence as the left side continued to hide her eyes and sob and the right side shot looks of hatred at me. Then the lady with the twin hairdoes slowly faded from my sight. I figured she went back to the mountain.

I worked late that night drafting my report to the American Medical Association. I also drank. I do not know how I got home and neither do I know if I lay with a two-headed woman. I do know that I was alive the next day.

At the office, the nurse Jan gave me a cold stare. "You got drunk. You had a lady in your office and you were so slopped with whiskey you wrote a nightmare report to the American Medical Associ-

ation. If I had mailed it as you instructed, you would have been defrocked or whatever it is they do to drunken doctors."

"They take away their licenses," I told her. My head splitting with each word. "Thanks for tearing up the report. I thought it was a good gag."

"Not very funny," Jan said. "Who was the woman you had the gay party with in your office?"

"The two-headed woman," I told her. "How did you know she was here?"

"She dropped a couple of handkerchiefs," Jan said sarcastically.

I beat a retreat to the office.

I went to the veterinarian I knew who had purchased the two-headed calf. After it died, he mounted the skeleton. I asked him if I could see it.

"You're the first physician I ever knew who was interested in cows," he said. "Thinking of switching?"

I ignored his wit and studied the calf. The spinal vertebrae were peculiar. At the neck, the column branched and at the branch were twin vertebrae so situated that if a surgeon could tie off the unwanted spinal cord, a

severance could be made without difficulty. The calf would not appear a freak if one head had been severed. Like my lady, Noreen, the necks were so constructed that the removal of one head—Nadeen—and a little plastic surgery could obliterate any trace of a second head.

There was a problem in surgery, but not really an acute one. That is, if my patient happened to be constructed as the calf.

I worried about it. I had not seen Two-Heads for a week, but from time to time it seemed as if I felt her presence. In my half-sleep I wondered if she were near me.

The image of her haunted me. The left side of her haunted me pleasantly while the right side sent a chill down my back. That dame could kill. She'd be the death of me if she had her way.

Of course I didn't for an instant plan to do the operation. I was only interested as a surgeon. Could it be done? I found myself making sketches of the two-headed woman. I marked on the diagram exactly how the cut would be made, exactly where the spinal cord would be tied off, the precise spot where the superfluous neck vertebrae would be removed.

Then she came again.

She materialized before me as I sat at dusk in my office. She wore a powder blue suit, trimly fitted. The hair on both heads was expertly dressed, curled short in the fashion of the day. She had been working on herself, this double dome, and I was flattered that she had worked to please me.

"Where have you been?" I demanded.

"To the Shadee," the right side said pleasantly.

"You sound almost civil," I said. "The last time you were here you wanted to kill me."

She smiled coyly. The left side, my girl-friend Noreen, giggled. "She's been to the mountains with her boyfriend," Noreen said.

"Well so have you," I shouted. "And let me remind you, that this double person business ends at the shoulders."

"Drop dead," said the one on the right and she gave me that carving look of hers. The one on the left purred at me. "Come here."

As I walked to her side, her eyes beheld me as if seeing glory. She was soft with love. It came from her and engulfed me. I shook with it and I fell in love in an

instant. I kissed her and knew I was hopelessly trapped.

I took care of that smart alec on the right side that night. I gave her a mickey that put her away till day-break and the one on the left, my Noreen, laughed in my ear and whispered to me all night.

It wouldn't really be murder, I told myself over and over again.

I fired nurse Jan. She protested that I was out of my mind when I closed my practice. Over her protests, I eased her gently out of the door and closed the building which housed my medical office.

With Noreen invisible at my side, I drove to a little seaport town on the Florida Gulf coast. I rented an out of the way house. I set up a laboratory and made ready for the operation. Noreen (with Nadeen under sedatives most of the time) lived with me in her visible state. We had a hard time coaxing Nadeen to do it, but she agreed to the sedatives and to go independently invisible so things wouldn't look bad to any one who happened to look in on us.

I spent hours running my

fingers over my love's neck, probing here, knuckling there and making more sketches. Finally all was prepared.

"We'll operate tomorrow night," I said.

To a surgeon, the operation was a dream. Like cutting a piece of cheese. I separated the vertebrae and did some plastic work. I was pretty busy, working alone, but it was a clean job about three hundred stitches and three hours.

Noreen, my love of the left, lay sleeping peacefully in our bed. As I made her comfortable, I figured that two weeks of care would make her better than new. The stitches could be removed and in another week, we'd be married. The worse that could come of it would be that Noreen would have a stiff neck for a week or so.

That's the way I had it figured.

But after I dug a ten-foot hole outside and went back for the head that was Nadeen—I *couldn't find it*. It had vanished.

They arrested us six weeks later as we were driving toward Tucson, Arizona.

Laughingly, I explained the whole thing. I had performed an operation on my wife. She had a second head, you see, and I removed it. I showed them the thin traces of the incision and the stitch marks.

They let Noreen go. They took me back to New York.

The police lieutenant asked, "The operation was performed in Florida?"

"It was."

"And where is Nadeen?"

"You mean the part I removed? I don't know."

"We do," the lieutenant said. They showed it to me. She was found in my closed New York medical office. Jan, burgled the joint after I left, led the police to it.

The jury was impossible. A head without a body, they ruled, was still a corpse. The body would be found, they said, some day. Bodies always are.

Every time I think of it, waiting here in this dark cell, I see Nadeen's head with its mocking smile disappearing and then coming back again to its place beside Noreen.

And Noreen, where are you? Back on Shadee Mountain? I'll never know.

They're going to fry me tomorrow.

THE END



*Anything can happen at Yonkers Stadium; you've been there of course, so you know. Old Dacey is a pretty clever manager, and of course you know that too. But were you there the day Dacey rang in a new pitcher? A "hairy country boy" who could pitch with both arms and both feet. Well, that was—*

# THE DAY BASEBALL DIED

By JIM COOPER





**R**EMEMBER, you historians, when you write your treatises on the death of baseball, that Stanislaus Dacey would never admit that Jim Pan-Zee was anything but human.

You'll never get Dacey to admit, either, that Edgar Pack was anything other than, "A good pitcher. Best man I ever saw on the mound."

This is important in your studies of why baseball died.

It is equally important that you know the story of Arthur J. Thaukool, for the death of baseball was, in the main,

Thaukool's own responsibility.

Baseball, you must know, was almost human. It was emotional. It existed of itself alone. It pulsed. It lived.

But what actually made it almost human was its heart. The heart of baseball was the baseball fan and Arthur J. Thaukool was the typical fan who woke in the morning thinking baseball, worked with it as if it were a wife and dreamed of it.

Thaukool *was* baseball. When he lost his faith, as the records of the major league disbandment hearings will reveal, baseball died.

Said Thaukool indignant-ly: "I never want to see the game again. I never want to hear of it. I want to purge my mind of baseball, of my storehouse of statistics and remembrances. I've had it." With those words, baseball's heart stopped beating and so—as the board of team owners decided—baseball was done.

Historians, this is being written because the disbandment hearings left out some of the details. You may profit by reading further—

As Stanislaus Dacey and Lefty Smith approached the 18th tee of the Pasadena Golf and Country Club, Smith fell to the ground like someone had heaved a beanball at him.

Someone had. It came from the direction of the hedgerow shutting off the 18th tee from the 17th green.

Turning as he fell, loyal Lefty Smith saw with immense relief that the duster had missed old Dacey.

"Great heavens, Chief. Did you see the curve on that ball?" Lefty cried.

Gazing after the rolling missile, Dacey said calmly, "That was no ball. That was a hedge apple. But it had one hell of a curve on it, I'll admit."

Dacey, his legs bent like

parentheses, his head lowered, his hands clutching his driver, moved like a pugnacious landing craft toward the hedgerow. Lefty Smith watched from his vantage point on the ground.

"Lookout Chief, here it comes again," he called in warning.

Dacey heard too late. The hedge apple sailed straight for his bent snoot. Suddenly, no further than two bat lengths away, the apple screwed downward, leveled off and burned past the old man through the heart of the strike zone.

Wiley old Dacey grinned and sprinted toward the hedge. He pulled up at the sound of a warning voice. "If you don't drop that club, he'll heave another one and you're so close you may get hit. His curve doesn't break that quick."

Dacey stopped and peered at the thick hedge. Out stepped a man in a pith helmet, khaki shorts and khaki shirt opened at the neck. He held a length of rope in his hands with a loop at one end.

He grinned at old Dacey. "I'm trying to rope him out of the hedge, the scoundrel. He thinks that's a gun in your hands. He's been gun shy ever since Africa and that's why

he chunks those hedge apples at you."

"He's got a daisy of a curve," Dacey grunted.

"Yeah," the hunter said. "It exasperates him. Can't hit a thing. It's even trickier with his left paw."

"Paw?"

"Yeah. He's a chimp." The man extended a hand for Dacey to shake. "I'm Brad Hunter. Big game importer for zoos. I'm training the chimp for San Diego."

Squinting upward, Dacey made out a hairy figure. It swung from the highest fork, clutching it with hands and feet—or four paws. The chimp chattered insults upon them.

"That's my ornery chimp," Hunter said.

Old Dacey, manager of the New York Yonkers world champion baseball team, turned to Lefty Smith, his chief pitching scout and former thirty-game winner.

"Lefty," said Dacey, "that ain't no chimp."

"It ain't?"

"Of course not," Dacey said as Hunter listened in bewilderment, "that up there is a holdout rookie. A little rough, perhaps, and hairy around the ears I'll admit. Maybe he's reluctant because he can't decide between college

and pro baseball. But we'll sign him, Lefty. Who cares about San Diego or the whole Pacific Coast League?"

Lefty Smith stared at the high fork in the hedge. "Yeah, Chief," he said, his eyes blinking and his head nodding slowly, "what is this feller, a lefty or a righty?"

Arthur J. Thaukool, daytime cheese plant worker in Milwaukee, turned to the sports page of the *Journal* and snapped it flat before him. Mrs. Thaukool stood behind him at the stove stirring a cheese soufflé.

Although the New York Yonkers management knew nothing of it, Arthur was their number one fan. He hated the Milwaukee Bruins. He passionately despised the Brooklyn Duckers.

"Well now by Gad," Thaukool said menacingly between his teeth. "We'll show those Duckers now."

"Of course we will," his wife said absently.

Thaukool felt a hurt, almost as much by her disinterest as by the jibes delivered his way by his neighbors and fellow workers. It was their special delight to taunt Thaukool. Their theme went like this: (1) Sure, Thaukool was the

world's number one Yonkers fan; (2) So what, being a Yonkers fan was certainly the easiest job in the world because they always won the pennant and the series. It took no effort to be faithful to a winner. (3) Only an idiot would shower his adoration on the New York Yonkers when he lived in Milwaukee; (4) And worst of all, fan or not, Arthur J. Thaukool had never seen the Yonkers play in his life.

But he loved them. His heart beat for them.

"We'll show the Yonkers and the rest of them this time," Thaukool said through gritted teeth. "To think, this new rookie, this Jim Pan-Zee old Dacey has just signed can throw them with either arm. Either arm, Myrtle! Get it? A forty game winner."

Thaukool shoved the picture of the new rookie under Myrtle's nose.

She said, "His sideburns run down to his collarbone."

"He's a farm boy," Thaukool said. "A bit rough, Dacey says, but he'll smooth out. Learned to pitch throwing hedge apples."

"He needs a shave—all over," Myrtle observed.

Thaukool went back to his paper, thinking somewhat intellectually about this particu-

lar fortune of the Yonkers and feeling sorry for Myrtle who couldn't seem to appreciate it.

Everyone knows that the Duckers, like the Yonkers, start figuring how to win the series before the season even opens, and while the news of the ambidextrous pitcher was of high interest to the American Leaguers, it was just as interesting to the National League Duckers. As a matter of fact, the Duckers were alarmed.

"Of course it's a monkey," Manager Alsop stormed at his attorney. "You've got the rules in front of you. You've got a hundred law books behind you there. Now find something that says monkeys can't play baseball."

"It's up to the commissioner," the lawyer said wearily. "It's in his hands. I'd advise you to win the pennant first, then worry about this new Yonkers rookie."

Stanislaus Dacey stormed in his office while Lefty Smith looked on. "I've had more trouble with that monkey than Noah had with—"

"I thought you said it was no monkey, Dacey? A rookie—Jim Pan-Zee. A little hairy around—"

"I said *rookie*," Dacey

growled, turning on him. "If it hadn't been for the Gibley Razor Blade outfit doing a television ad on him using one of their razors I'd never have convinced the commissioner. What does it matter what he looks like? Why, I'd sign a couple dozen more if I could get them. I'd replace that smart alec team out there," he said waving toward the windows overlooking Yonkers Stadium. "Opening day and those bums refuse to room in the same hotel with Pan-Zee and eat at the same table."

"He has better manners than they do," Smith said. "He shows them up."

"That's only part of the trouble. Hunter, his trainer, is trying to get out of his contract, but I've got him sewed solid. He's jealous."

"Because Pan-Zee's getting all the headlines, Boss?"

"No. Because the Pan-Zee boy stole Hunter's girl friend."

Lefty Smith put an arm across Dacey's shoulders. "You feel okay, Boss?"

Dacey turned away. His shoulders drooped as if in defeat. "All right, Lefty, I'll level with you," the old man said. "Sure, he looks and acts like a monkey. A dumb monkey at that. And I don't

blame our boys for being sore about it. He gets more money than most of them. After all, Pan-Zee didn't even play in the minors. He came up the lucky way."

The Yonkers manager strolled to the window and looked out over the diamond. "I didn't mean it that way when I said Pan-Zee stole his trainer's girl friend. You know dames. She stole him. She's a show girl, Flossy Molloy. She saw an easy way to lay her hands on a buck so she took over. She spends most of Pan-Zee's salary and won't pay any attention to the trainer and he's jealous. Everyone is jealous."

The manager's thirty-game winner came to stand beside him at the window. "Let's you and me give up," Lefty said. "Let's don't fight it. Monkeys. Monkeys, Dacey, in baseball! Let's go back to Pasadena."

Dacey turned to face him with tears in his eyes. He said, gently, "He isn't a monkey, I said. But forget that. Just one more season, Lefty. Think of it. A forty-game winner!"

Having a forty-game winner, however, even with a pitcher who could throw with either wing, proved to re-

quire more than putting a questionable chimp on the mound.

Jim Pan-Zee won his first five games handily. Every ball he pitched was thrown directly at the batter's head, yet invariably its spin would take control, just before bashing the terrified batsman, and shoot the ball downward through the strike zone. It worked better for the Yonkers if Pan-Zee pitched right handed to right handed batters and left handed to left handers. That way, the spin and the drop went just right.

American League opponents caught on quickly. They'd put in left handers on the days the Pan-Zee boy was pitching right handed and vice versa.

But smart old Stanislaus Dacey beat them again. He made the catcher, Berra Cuda, cozy up to Pan-Zee. They became such good friends that the pitcher would do anything Cuda told him to do.

So if Pan-Zee was pitching right handed and they put in a left handed batter, Cuda would step to the mound and switch the glove on his pal, taking it off the left and putting it on the right. Then, Pan-Zee would have to throw left handed.

Hunter trained Pan-Zee to bat, but he was horrible. Dacey was concerned. "I can't understand it," he told the sports writers. "He's got exactly the same stance as Cuda, but he can't hit a thing."

Then there was the incident of the bananas.

Pan-Zee was asked to endorse banana eating by the American Banana Importers, Inc., which his trainer happily had him do. Through the endorsement, American League coaches and managers were given an idea.

Two days after Pan-Zee won his tenth game, Dacey sent him to the mound against the Cleveland. Cleveland Coach Al Gonzales told his boys in the dugout: "Don't you slobs worry none about it. Just go in there the first time at bat and stall around. I've taken care of everything."

Gonzales had purchased the boxes along the third base line and when Pan-Zee had pitched a couple of strikes, the spectators in the Gonzales boxes started waving bunches of bananas. Pan-Zee loved bananas. He caught their gleaming yellow out of the corner of his eye and immediately scampered off the

mound and into the nearest box.

The umpire gave Pan-Zee five minutes to return to the mound. He refused and sat in the box munching bananas until Trainer Hunter could be summoned to the park from the nearest bar where he had been drowning his sorrows over Miss Flossy Molloy.

Dacey was wild. He fined Hunter five hundred dollars. He ordered him to break Pan-Zee of the banana habit and he further ordered him to stand in front of the dug-out throughout each game to catch Pan-Zee if he again made an unscheduled departure from the mound.

Hunter agreed. But relations between the trainer and Pan-Zee were strained at best. The pitcher was making a monkey of Hunter.

As the season wore on, Pan-Zee's popularity grew. Fans threw a Pan-Zee day in Yonkers Stadium and presented their hero with a Cadillac. He and Miss Flossy Molloy rode off the field with the young lady driving and Pan-Zee hamming it up for the crowd while sitting on the lowered top in the back seat.

It was a great day for the Yonkers and for Stanislaus Dacey. He had a thirty-nine game winner; he had the

pennant in the bag; and with Pan-Zee, he'd beat the powerful Duckers in the series.

The gods had been kind. Then the following day, tragedy struck. The nemesis of all pitchers hit.

If there was grief, if there was despair at Yonkers Stadium, it was as nothing compared to the atmosphere in a certain home in Milwaukee.

There, Arthur J. Thaukool was a wreck. He could not work. He could not eat the cheese his wife prepared for him. It was a long time before Myrtle could bring him to speak. Finally, she broke the barrier and Thaukool's troubles poured out in a torrent of words.

"Myrtle, it's stark tragedy. Horrible. Here we had a thirty-nine game winner in this boy Pan-Zee. We had old Dacey pledged to go on leading the Yonkers next year if he got a forty-game winner. We had the series in our pocket. Now we are done. We'll not get a forty-game winner. We'll lose the series. We'll lose old Dacey!"

"What happened?" she asked worriedly. "Did the monkey go back to the trees?"

Thaukool glared at his wife. "Myrtle! No one has ever definitely established

that the lad is a monkey. Please!"

"Well, what happened?" she asked patiently.

"Jim Pan-Zee has a sore arm," Thaukool replied wildly. "It's his right arm. He has to use his left arm all the time now and they're putting up nothing but right handers against him. His curve doesn't work right. It goes behind the batter." His voice rose. "What happened, you ask? Merely the world's greatest tragedy. Nothing could be worse!"

Myrtle dished up some macaroni and cheese. "Eat this," she said with unusual tenderness. "How did his arm get sore?"

"Closed his Cadillac door on it I understand," Thaukool told her. He took a bite of the food.

Heartened at his eating, Myrtle pursued the subject. "I think I understand," she said. "He has to have both arms working right in order to pitch, because of the left and right handed batting business?"

Thaukool nodded.

"I hate to suggest this," she went on. "It seems to be touchy with you. But this boy of yours, have you ever noticed that he doesn't wear shoes?"

"So he's a little rough," Thaukool challenged.

"Have you noticed his feet? I've seen pictures," she said.

"So they're a little hairy."

"Yes," she said. "And so they're exact duplicates of his hands. Thumbs and all. Tell them to have him pitch with his feet."

Dacey paced his office waiting for Brad Hunter, the trainer. He came in, somewhat bleary-eyed, and Dacey pounced on him.

"The boy pitcher. Where is he?"

"In his cage. I'm boarding him at the zoo."

"The zoo?" Dacey seemed horrified. "A Yonkers player in the zoo! Look, Hunter, here's the point. Can he pitch with those feet of his?"

"Seems I can remember him heaving things with his feet, but I'm not sure. Want me to try him?"

Dacey motioned to Lefty Smith. "Let's go to the zoo."

"Boss, you're a genius," Lefty said. "Pure."

Dacey smiled. He was thinking of an eighty-game winner next year.

And now the confident Duckers were worried. The Yonkers won the last five games of the season with Pan-Zee going the distance



each time. His left foot curve was particularly brutal. With it, he won a no-hitter.

Manager Alsop tried nearly everything. He had gone to the Supreme Court in his efforts to have Pan-Zee legally declared a monkey. But they must have all been Yonkers fans. With dismay, Alsop heard their denial to accept the case. They refused on the ground that such a decision might prove discriminatory.

So Alsop reverted to the common weakness of all men and monkeys, for that matter. He sent for Miss Flossy Molloy.

"For one thousand bucks can you bring Pan-Zee's trainer to me?" he demanded.

She could.

To Hunter, the trainer, Alsop said, "You beat the American League managers on their banana gimmick. For ten thousand bucks will you come to work for me?"

"What do you want?"

"I want that kid Pan-Zee retired from baseball. I don't care how you do it."

"That," Hunter grinned, "would be a pleasure."

"How did you cure him of chasing after bananas?"

"I made him afraid of them."

"Why does he pitch?"

"Because he hates the bat. He thinks it's a gun."

"Maybe," Alsop said. "But why doesn't he pitch at bananas? We've tried him on that and all he does is ignore them."

"Let's talk for fifteen thousand dollars," Hunter said.

"Talk."

"The kid's reactions are always the same because that is the way he is trained. He doesn't seem to have emotional shadings. His reactions don't change because he apparently doesn't think. I said Pan-Zee is afraid of bananas. He is. I trained him that way. He ignores them. I said he hates bats. He does. He thinks they are guns. He attacks them. What do you want me to do for fifteen thousand dollars?"

"Make him afraid of bats," Alsop said.

"I will," Hunter vowed, "and then maybe I can give you some help with another idea I have." Right now he had his job cut out for him.

Arthur J. Thaukool raced into the kitchen with the letter in his hand.

"I did it, Myrtle! I brought honor not only to the house of Thaukool but to the whole city of Milwaukee. Now," he said through clenched teeth,

"now let them laugh at the Yonkers."

"What did you do?" she asked.

"Just like I told you," he said. "The lad should pitch with his feet."

"So you did."

"Myrtle, let that cheese stew go and listen to this letter," he said. "Dear Mr. Thaukool. So and so and so. Now get this, Myrtle. It says while we had previously been working on the solution you suggested, we want to thank you for your interest. Fans make the game. Please accept these tickets to the world series as our appreciation. And," Thaukool said grandly, "it's signed Stanislaus Dacey. Dacey!"

"I know that you are deserving," she said.

The cheese packers at the factory gave Thaukool a farewell beer party. The neighborhood families crowded into his house for dinner that night. A caravan of cars accompanied him to the boat which would take him to Chicago and two of his neighbors carried a banner advising any watchers that "The World's Greatest Yonkers Fan" was on his way to the series.

Thaukool made a short

speech. He was choked up. He did, however, say that he was accepting the honor not for himself but for all of them. "I'm looking forward to coming in contact with as many Yonkers players as possible," he said, "and I will give them your blessings on a successful series."

The day the series opened brought more thrills to Thaukool than he expected.

Lefty Smith called him at his hotel. It happened that a prankster friend of Thaukool's had telephoned the *New York Herald-Tribune's* sports department and tipped them off that Thaukool was the man who gave Dacey the idea of the secret weapon usage of Pan-Zee's other two appendages. Reporters met Thaukool at his train and asked for a story.

"You'd better clear it with Dacey first," Thaukool told them in a cagey display of protocol. "Don't want to do anything that might upset the Yonkers' strategy."

Dacey told the reporters to go climb a tree when they tried to clear it with him. And he told Lefty Smith to keep an eye on this Thaukool character. Thus, Arthur J. Thaukool, the world's greatest Yonkers fan, was invited to luncheon at the exclusive

Yonkers club. Afterward, he was taken to the dressing-room to meet the players.

He shook hands with Cuda and gave him a friendly punch on the shoulder. "Catch 'em in there, Cuda boy," said Thaukool. To first baseman Corky Corbett, he advised, "Keep that old glove up there, boy," and he told Lord, "Chin up there, boy. Even though we won't have to use you we still like to have you around." He gave him a hearty tap.

The greatest thrill was kept to the last. Thaukool was taken to Pan-Zee's bench. When the fan extended a hand to grasp at least one of Pan-Zee's four magic pitching hands, the boy bared his teeth and made out as if to take a bite. Thaukool hastily withdrew his hand, but chuckled good naturedly. "Saving the old arm, eh? That's thinking, Pan-Zee boy. Go in there and burn 'em boy."

Pan-Zee sneered and busied himself with something or other that seemed to be buried among his chest hairs.

Thaukool was escorted to a first-base box where he sat with five other Yonkers fans. "We win in four, boys," he told them jubilantly and he was well received because these, too, happened to be of

the world's greatest Yonkers fans variety.

The Duckers were at bat. Alsop seemed confident. The Yonkers took the field. Pan-Zee went hopping to the mound under the watchful eye of Trainer Hunter and the Yonkers fans went wild. Dacey stood by the dugout, grinding a fist into a palm.

Pan-Zee was calm, relaxed. His arms hung limply at his side. He grasped the ball in his right foot and on his left was his glove.

A menacing Ducker approached the plate and Cuda crouched behind, calling for the ball. The batter waved his stick threateningly. But Pan-Zee ignored him.

The umpire called for Pan-Zee to play ball and still Pan-Zee was unmoved. The Yonkers fans began to shift uneasily. Cat calls came from Duckers fans. Dacey edged toward the foul line.

The umpire yelled again and Cuda motioned for the ball. But Pan-Zee stood as before, arms limp, ball grasped in his right foot, glove on the left foot.

Corky Corbett, at first base, captain of the team, yelled at the pitcher. "You stupid ape, throw the ball."

"Throw it, boy," urged

Thaukool, somewhat worried.

Cuda pleaded with his roommate. "Toss it, pal."

Corky Corbett yelled again and waved his huge, first baseman's mitt.

In doing so, he caught Pan-Zee's eye and the boy's small brain remembered a night of horror—the night just ended.

He had undergone new training from Hunter. That bat wasn't a gun at all. It was something that tapped a lad on his nose. Pan-Zee was afraid of it. He ignored it now.

That big mitt on Corky Corbett's fist over there—Pan-Zee remembered it. What a contraption it was, under the genius of Hunter. It hung over Pan-Zee's head, just out of reach last night. It buzzed irritatingly. Pan-Zee leaped for it. It jumped out of his reach. Pan-Zee settled down. The glove came down over his head. It buzzed. Then it jumped away. Hour after hour after hour. He hated it.

Suddenly Pan-Zee whirled. He cocked his right foot and burned the ball at Corky Corbett. Corbett ducked, just as the ball paused before its downward curve, and the

head of Corbett cracked like a bat.

They carried Corbett away and Beanpole Benson was substituted. Benson waved the glove and yelled, "Pitch it, you tree climber."

Pan-Zee threw the pill at Beanpole. Benson ducked successfully and suddenly decided to quit baseball. He raced for the stands and made his exit by way of Thaukool's box. Pan-Zee took after him. Benson brushed by Thaukool and raced up the steps of the stadium. Pan-Zee followed, screeching as he leaped into the box. Thaukool tried to stop him. "Steady, old boy," he said. "Cool there. To the field! So what's a first baseman?"

By this time, old Dacey, Lefty Smith and the field of Yonkers players and all the substitutes were converging on the box. They climbed the railing and walked over Thaukool, then raced up the steps after the boy Pan-Zee. Thaukool did come, as he had hoped, in contact with as many Yonkers players as possible.

Duckers fans cheered. Yonkers fans booed and there was no question that they were booing old Dacey.

The banter continued as the fans refused to leave the

field. It seemed as if they were waiting for the Yonkers to return so they could present their opinions in person.

The din was terrible, but through it all—casting all the jibes, the ridicule and torment aside—one fan alone was staunch and loyal.

Said Arthur J. Thaukool, heartily and full of confidence:

"It's all right, boys. The Yonkers know what they're doing. Why look, here comes old Dacey and the gang back on the field now."

"Boys, I tell you it's all right. I've got inside information. You can't fool old Dacey, you know. I happen to be in on the secret that he sold Pan-Zee just an hour before lunch. Sold him to the Clevelands, by Gad, that's who he sold them to. Dacey always could outsmart them!"

The word spread through the stadium and suddenly the fans calmed down. Then they began snickering at the trick old Dacey had pulled on the Clevelands selling them a has-been pitcher and soon the Yonkers Stadium was reverberating with loud guffaws. Dacey did it again!

"Play ball," the umpire cried, and play ball they began to do. Dacey put in Tar-

box and he burned the Duckers to cinders that inning.

Yonkers fans were festive. That is, until their boys came to bat and the Duckers took to the field. It was then that Manager Alsop of the Duckers motioned to the bull pen for a new pitcher.

He had the fans guessing this day, for when Alsop motioned with his right hand, everyone knew he was calling for a right hander. When he waved with his left, he was calling for a southpaw. This time, Alsop put his palm to his nose and then waved downward.

The field announcer was rattling on, "Oh, yes," he said. "The new pitcher for the Duckers is Edgar Pack. Now let's look at the record."

There followed a silence that lasts today in deserted, weed-grown Yonkers Stadium.

For out of the bull pen lumbered Edgar Pack. He was erect and walking slowly on his hind legs. His long trunk, swaying as he came to the mound, dipped into the dirt, snorted a couple of times and caught the ball handily as Catcher Rodriguez tossed it his way.

And that was the end of baseball.

**THE END**



The choice wasn't compulsory of course, but  
who needed compulsion?

# THE MARRIAGE MACHINE

By O. H. LESLIE

---

*The Parson was an iron monster dedicated to taking the nonsense out of marriage—making it simple and scientific. The Parson went to work in behalf of Betty and Warren and Doug. And the results? Well, they satisfied the Parson.*

---

THE young man was distracting.

Betty Bryce watched his antics through the curved glass windows of the Matrimonial Advisory Association Building. He was parading back and forth across the lawn like a disgruntled sentry; hand shoved deep into his trouser pockets; his nice-if-he-would-only-smile face contorted into a boyish frown.

Betty sighed, and tried to concentrate on the application blank in front of her. She put the end of her pencil to her red mouth, drew her neat eyebrows down thoughtfully, and kept her eyes on the paper.

But it was no good. There he was, criss-crossing in front of the building, his dark-blue sweater a blur in front of her eyes.

"Honestly!"

She slammed the pencil to the desk and swept the thick blonde hair away from her forehead.

Warren de Witt, the branch manager, looked up from the opposite desk. He pinched the bridge of his nose.

"Something wrong?"

"I wish he'd go *away*!" She didn't look at Warren when she said it; Warren had an unpleasant habit of looking back at her too long and thoroughly.

"Who would? And from where?"

"That boy." She tossed her head in the direction of the window. "And from here. He's been walking back and forth for the last half hour."

"Ha." Warren stood up stiffly, tugged at his trim

jacket, and took the knot of his tie delicately between his long fingers. "I'll see what he wants—"

"Please," Betty said. "I've got two dozen applications to process through the machine this morning—"

Warren stopped by her desk on the way to the doorway. He glanced curiously out of the plate-glass, and sniffed when he saw the object of her attention.

"Looks like a hoodlum," he said.

"Oh, I don't think he's *that*—"

"He's wearing a *sweater*."

"Well, so am I."

Warren looked at her, and his eyebrows lifted. "Ah, yes," he said. He put his hand on her arm. "Betty, dear—"

"Please send him away, Warren."

"There's no need. He's coming in."

The young man seemed to have made up his mind at last. He was striding long-legged to the entrance, his jaw grim with purpose. He flung the door open, and closed it with a slam that made Betty's nerves jump.

"Now see here—" Warren began.

"Is this MAA Branch Thirty-two?" the boy shouted.

"Yes!" Betty spoke just as loudly. "You ought to know by *now*!"

"I'm Douglas Brady!"

"So what!"

"Please!" Warren was dismayed. "Must everybody yell?" He set a good example by lowering his voice to a dignified level. "If you have some business here, young man—"

"Don't call me young man!" the young man snapped. He looked around the office, half-curious, half-cautious. "What a joint," he said, faintly disgusted.

"This is not a joint," Warren said coldly. "This is a recognized institution."

Douglas Brady was peering at the objects displayed on the walls. Most of them were framed certificates.

"Where's the pictures?" he said.

"What pictures?" Betty asked.

"Pictures of the prospects," Doug said sourly. "All the pretty girls and boys. This is a Marriage Bureau, isn't it?" His tone was acrid.

"It's nothing of the sort!" Warren de Witt was horrified. "This is an advisory service—a scientific guidance center—"

The young man looked confused. Then he took a closer look at Betty, and looked even more bewildered. Then he



proved that blushing wasn't a forgotten art.

"I think the whole thing's pretty stupid," he muttered.

"Well!" Warren turned his back, shoved the swinging gate behind him, and returned to his desk.

"Did you want to file an application?" Betty said.

He glanced up under his beetled brows and looked at Betty again. The surveillance reminded her of Warren's, but she didn't mind it as much.

"Who are you?" he said sullenly.

"I'm Miss Bryce. And this is Mr. de Witt, our branch manager." She paused, and then reached across her desk for a yellow pamphlet. "Do you have our literature?"

The young man shook his head.

"I'm sure you'll understand our service better when you read it." She handed him the pamphlet, but he didn't take it.

"You tell me about it," he said.

Warren de Witt made a noise.

Betty was perplexed. "Certainly, you must *know*—"

"Well, I want *your* views," Doug Brady said. He leaned his elbows on the railing and studied her face. "What do

*you* think of this—this eugenic nonsense?"

"It's not eugenics." Betty wouldn't let their eyes meet. "Not in the old-fashioned sense. It's just a way of helping people find their—well, their most suitable mate. The MAA's been doing it for ten years, since 1960. We keep the biographical records of over forty million unmarried people. Possible partners are chosen electronically by the Parson." She reddened, and laughed apologetically. "We only call it the Parson," she explained. "It's officially the EMCC—Electronic Marriage Compatibility Computer."

"Very scientific," Doug grunted.

"The Computer selects several possible partners," Betty said, somewhat defensively. "There's no compulsion, you know. It's strictly an optional service."

"Big deal," the young man said.

"There are almost four thousand MAA branches in cities and towns all over the country. You read the pamphlet. We have statistics about the divorce rate that will—"

"Statistics?" Doug Brady said. "Is that what you think love and marriage is? A bunch of statistics?"

"Ha!" Warren de Witt said.

Then: "How old are you, young man?"

Defiantly: "Twenty-six."

"You have some old-fashioned ideas for a man of twenty-six." He sniffed.

"Do you want an application blank or don't you?" Betty said.

"All right," he glowered. "Let me see your silly application—"

She passed it across the desk.

Then he scanned it: "Age, height, weight, hair color, eye color, background, schooling, hobbies, interests, psychological tests—" He glared at the girl. "Are *you* in that— machine?"

She lifted her head. "Certainly."

"Husand-hunting?"

"That's not the point."

"Ever run off a few marriage prospects for yourself?"

"Now see here—" The branch manager started out of his chair.

"As a mater of fact, no," Betty said.

"You don't have to tell *him*—" Warren said angrily.

"Okay, okay!" Doug Brady waved his hands. "I didn't mean to get personal." He flipped through the sheets of paper in his grip. "You know, this looks awfully complicat-

ed." He turned to Betty. "I don't suppose you'd be interested in helping me fill this out?"

"It's not *that* difficult," Warren said sharply.

"It really isn't," Betty echoed shyly.

"I mean at lunch or something. Or dinner, if you haven't got anything better to do."

"Ha!" Warren de Witt said. "*Ties* are required in most restaurants, you know. Except diners, of course."

"I'm *wearing* a tie," Doug Brady said stoutly. He tugged at the collar of his wool sweater. "See?"

"I'm afraid I can't. I have a lunch date," Betty said. "But I *am* free for dinner . . ." She looked wistfully toward the branch manager, who pursed his lips and wrote furiously on the notepaper in front of him.

"Swell!" The young man's face brightened for the first time. "Tell me where to pick you up. I'll be around at seven."

"80 Clarence Avenue . . ." Betty said dreamily.

"Good." He started out, but had to return for the application forms. "Mustn't forget the Parson," he said cheerfully.

When he had gone, Warren

de Witt looked at Betty with his mouth open.

"Now what in the world made you do that?"

"I really don't know . . ." she said.

That night, Doug Brady arrived in an automobile of ancient vintage—1950 at least—and honked the horn while she made last-minute adjustments on her make-up. For a boy whom she had met only hours ago, he acted terribly casual and possessive. He held her arm familiarly when helping her into the car, and grasped it firmly and positively when they entered the Candlelight Restaurant on Route 22.

He didn't lack for small talk, and somehow he made it sound more important. Betty didn't learn too much about him (he was single, a Navy veteran, and a something-or-other engineer) but she found herself talking fluently and happily about herself.

They went to a drive-in theatre after dinner, and the only advantage he took of the darkness and isolation was to put one arm comfortably around her shoulder.

He never once spoke of the Matrimonial Advisory Association, and he left her at the door of her home with nothing more than a friendly handshake.

Betty hated to admit it. But she was disappointed.

She felt better the next morning. Her office telephone rang, and it was Doug.

"Hi. How's the Parson?"

She laughed. "Very busy. We had four clients before ten o'clock. You can really tell it's spring."

"You know what I forgot to ask you?"

"What?"

"What happens if the Parson picks a partner—whew! what a tongue-twister!—what happens if the partner picks out a mate that doesn't like you?"

"That's up to the individual. The Parson gives several choices, you know. The chances are usually pretty good that the people get along. Why don't you read the pamphlet?"

"No time for reading. I'll have to get more facts about the business first-hand. Is tonight all right?"

"Betty." Warren de Witt came out of the back room that housed the Marriage Machine.

"How about it?" Doug Brady said on the other end of the phone. "I can pick you up at the office at five, when I bring in my application."

"Betty!" Warren must have

sensed something; he looked definitely disturbed. "Would you mind stepping in back a moment?"

"All right, Warren."

"All right, who?" said Doug.

"All right, Doug," she said into the mouthpiece.

"All right, who?" said Warren.

"Oh, nothing." She hung up the phone. "Now what about that back room?"

"Was that—that sweater boy on the phone?"

"Yes."

"Did you go out with him last night?"

"Yes."

"Are you seeing him again?"

"Yes."

He sniffed. "Ha. That's funny. Seems to me you've always been too busy for dates." He turned his back. "Or are you just too busy to date me?"

Quickly: "Oh, no, Warren. It isn't that at all. Well, you know—people working in the same office. And you *are* the branch manager, after all."

Warren looked at her curiously.

"Betty—do you really *believe* in your work?"

"Of course!"

"I mean *really*." His hand went to his tie. "Believe in it

for yourself. That's what I'm driving at."

She hesitated. "I suppose I do. I'm on file with the Parson, you know. That should prove something."

"Does it?" He circled the desk and took her seat. He looked up at her with an angelic smile and tapped his fingertips together. "Did you ever think of—locating your mate?"

Betty colored. The effect was pretty, and it didn't escape Warren. "I—I never thought of it. I suppose I never thought of it. I suppose I never really wanted to find out. And besides—I know you'll think this is old-fashioned of me, Warren—but it seems to me that a woman has to—well . . ."

"Has to be chased?" Warren said. She reddened further, so he hastily spelled the word. "I mean pursued," he said. Betty understood.

"Well—it seems like a good arrangement."

"Sometimes I wonder. The MAA Manual doesn't have much to say on the subject. But it seems to me, if women are *really* emancipated, they should be permitted to take the initiative. Especially since the innovation of the Marriage Machine."

"Yes," Betty said vaguely.

"Now what was it you wanted in the back room?"

Warren de Witt sighed. "Never mind," he said. "I don't think the time is right."

"Huh?" said Betty.

Doug Brady picked a different restaurant that night, and his conversation was different, too.

"I can't believe it," he said.

"Can't believe what?"

"Can't believe that *you* believe it," he said

"I'm mixed up."

"That's what I think." He leaned across the table. "I think this Parson nonsense has you all mixed up. The whole idea is an abomination in the sight of Mother Nature. What are all the love songs about? What's the moon for? What are all the poets knocking themselves out over?"

"My!" Betty said.

"Oh, I know. It's practically heretical nowadays. But I can't help feeling that there are *some* subjects that Thinking Machines shouldn't be Thinking about. It's—indecent!"

"You're starting to shout."

"I *feel* like shouting!" he shouted. The people at the adjoining tables turned towards them. "Listen. Machines don't have hearts. Machines don't hold hands. If you kiss 'em,

you get oil on your face. And the day you show me a machine that can have a baby—"

"Doug!"

"Well, it's true, isn't it? So what makes this all-holy Marriage Machine so darn great? What the heck was wrong with Dorothy Dix?"

"Now you're being ridiculous. The principles of the EMCC are very simple. They don't *force* anyone to—"

"You sound just like the pamphlet," Doug said.

"So you *did* read it."

"Sure, I read it. But it didn't change my mind. Machines just don't know how to make love, Betty. That's one thing reserved for us humans." His hand went across the table and touched hers. "You believe *that*, don't you?"

"Yes," she whispered. "I believe *that*, Doug . . ."

It went on for two happy weeks.

Happy, that is, for Betty. Her boss, branch manager Warren de Witt, saw things differently.

The first thing he said to her on Thursday morning was:

"Let's have lunch today, Betty."

"Lunch?"

"It's important. Very important." He pinched his nose

and looked like a man with the weight of the world perched on his shoulder blades.

"Well, I did have a sort of tentative date—"

"Break it," Warren said curtly. "I want to talk to you about something vital. Business, you might say . . ."

She looked at him oddly. "All right, Warren."

He took her to Coq Rouge, the most exclusive wine-and-dinery within forty miles. The main dining room was all red velvet, gleaming brass, and damask white, and you could not hear a footstep in the place.

"Well, now. Isn't this nice?" Warren said.

"Yes. It's lovely."

Warren's early-morning mood had changed. He had been somber and mysterious when he made the invitation; now he was Mine Goodly Host. He smiled broadly, and Betty was amazed at the amount of teeth he had.

"Some wine with our meal?" he asked suavely.

"I suppose that would be nice."

He ordered something so exotically-named that the very sight of the label made Betty's head swim. By the time the coffee had arrived, she was feeling far more

light-headed than was comfortable. She even giggled.

"Well, what's so big and vital?" she asked, blinking at him over the coffee cup. His head refused to stay in focus.

"It's about the MAA," Warren said carefully, dotting his mouth with the napkin. "And the EMCC."

"O.K.," Betty said gaily. "P.D.Q." She hiccupped. "Pardon me."

"And it's about Douglas Brady, too," Warren said pointedly.

"What about him?"

"Betty—" He leaned across the table and clutched her limp hand. "Are you serious about this—boy?"

She eyed him with what she supposed to be shrewdness. "Maybe I am. And maybe I'm not." She tittered.

"Betty, there's a great deal at stake here. A great deal at stake."

"Steak?" she said blankly, smothering a lady-like burp.

"There's a vital principle involved. A national institution. Do you know what I'm talking about?"

She shook her head. It was not the best idea. "You know," she said blearily, "I don't think I'm much of a wine-drinker . . ."

"You've been with the MAA for three years now. You're

one of our most promising people. You *understand* the organization. That's important."

"Could I have some more coffee?"

"Faith. Sincerity. These are highly important attributes. That's why I've been keeping my eye on you. Your attributes—"

"I beg your pardon!"

"I mean your ability," Warren said hastily. "Your love of the work. Your devotion to the principles of compatibility." He leaned back in his chair. "I don't want to see you throw it all away, Betty."

"Throw what away?"

"Your opportunity." He grabbed her hand again. "Betty, don't you see? This—this hoodlum you've been seeing. The one who scoffs at everything we stand for. He's subverting you—"

"He is not!" Betty's head wobbled. "He didn't even *kiss* me 'till last week—"

"Why, your very *interest* in him is a subversion of our principles! I tell you, there's only one thing to do in this situation—"

"What's that?"

Warren paused. Then he displayed his toothy smile and said:

"Ask the Parson."

Betty left the office early

that afternoon. She had a headache, and it wasn't all due to the luncheon wine. Warren's advice had hit something in her mind, and stuck there like a clinging burr.

Doug called her at home when he learned she was out, and she cancelled their evening date, pleading illness.

She spent a restless night, and when she appeared the next morning, her eyes were tired.

"Warren," she said to the branch manager.

"Yes, my dear."

"Warren, I've been thinking about what you said yesterday, at lunch. About the Parson."

"And you've decided—?"

"I think you're right." She sat down and stared at the floor. "It can't do any *harm*, can it? After all, there's no *compulsion*—"

"Of course not," Warren said smoothly. His grin was wide. "But you owe it to yourself to express your faith in the MAA—"

"Yes. Yes, that's the way I look at it."

"Fine. We'll run you through this morning." Warren rubbed his hands together.

"There's one thing," Betty said.

"What's that?"

"Doug Brady. Have you processed his application? Is he in the machine?"

"Of course. I did it last week."

She rose wearily. "Well. Then let's get it over with."

They went into the back room, where the Parson was.

It stretched out for some fifty feet, its chrome face gleaming, its dials and counters merrily turning, locating the Perfect Partners for one of the early-morning clients.

"I'll just take care of Mrs. Forbush," Warren said.

"Mrs.?"

"A widow. Sixty-eight years old, but still romantic. It's quite a spring," he said gleefully.

The machine wound up its business, and the branch manager lifted out the tiny discs that bore the names and chief characteristics of recommended mates for the sprightly Mrs. Forbush. He ran the discs through the teleprinting machine, and produced half a dozen file cards, with names, addresses and other pertinent data.

"I'll just put these in the mailroom," he said, "and we'll be all set."

When he returned, Betty was sitting disconsolately on the stool in front of the main operating controls of the

EMCC. She watched the branch manager as he went through the familiar process of setting the switches and dials.

He held up a tiny disc. "This is you," he said happily. "And in we go—" He dropped the disc into the slot.

The Parson chattered.

In fifty seconds, the Answer came tumbling out—fourteen little discs, bearing the names of the Parson's choices.

"I'll put them in the teleprinter," Warren said.

He whistled while he worked.

"Here they are!"

He handed her the file cards.

She read the names aloud, in a voice she didn't recognize as her own.

"Martin McGee, William Davison, Harry Lundgren, Jerry Jameson, Frank Baker . . ."

She stopped, and her eyes widened at the next card.

"*Warren de Witt . . .*"

Warren was tactful. His conversation to her for the rest of the day was limited to business matters. And when Doug Brady called that afternoon, he politely moved out of earshot.

He might have been pleased with Betty's part of the conversation.



"No, Doug," she said into the phone, her eyes shut tight. "I just can't make it tonight . . . No, not this week-end. I—I think I might have to go out of town. To see some friends . . . No, really, it's nothing like that . . . I just think we've been . . . (she choked when she said the next words) . . . well, seeing each other just a little too much. I don't think it's wise . . . for both of us . . ."

Warren came back into the room just as she hung up.

He was still whistling.

Monday morning was bright, but Betty's mood was gray.

She processed the applications mechanically, absorbed in the lengthy statistics. When she had occasion to operate the Parson, she found herself fumbling with the operating switches.

Warren was thoughtful. He straightened out the complexity of dials, and told her not to worry.

"Thank you," she said sadly. "You're very kind, Warren."

About eleven o'clock, she glanced out of the curved glass window in front of the building.

"Honestly!" she said.

Warren looked up. First he appraised her, then he looked

in the direction of her glance.

"Is *he* back again?" he said tightly.

"No," Betty told him. "It's a girl this time. And she's acting just as silly."

Warren looked out, and the girl, who had stopped her restless pacing in front of the MAA building, looked back at him. Then she hastily averted her eyes and began to stroll back and forth once more.

"Seems to be a national hobby," he said grimly. "I'll tell her to come in or go away." Grumbling, he started for the door. "You'd think we were being picketed . . ."

Betty made a noise, and Warren paused in his march to the entrance and looked at her.

"What is it?"

"Doug—"

Warren opened the door, just in time to admit a determined Douglas Brady. He wore a blue sweater and a black scowl.

"Well!" Warren said. "And what can we do for *you*?"

"I want to see Betty?"

"Must I remind you that this is a *business* office?"

Doug went to her desk. "Now, look—" he said.

She turned away. "I don't have anything to say, Doug."

"You've got *plenty* to say to me! You and your week-end!"

"What do you mean?"

"I passed your house on Sunday morning." He looked at the floor. "Passed nothing. I went there deliberately."

"Ha!" Warren said. "Spying!"

"I saw you take in the milk." He came closer to her. "You looked so cute and domestic—in your housecoat—"

"Really!" Warren was bristling.

"What's come over you, Betty? What happened?"

"Nothing, Doug!" She still wouldn't look at him. "I told you exactly how I felt over the phone. I just think we're—rushing this thing, that's all." She was hardly convincing.

"Rushing?" Doug scratched his head. "Listen, what's the good of slowing down? Why do you think there are so few snails in the world?"

"Ha!" Warren said.

"Listen, if I did anything wrong—"

"You didn't, Doug. That's not the reason—"

"Then what is the reason?"

"Is this MAA Branch Thirty-two?" The voice came from the doorway, and the three heads turned in that direction.

The speaker was a girl, in a neat charcoal gray suit. She looked doubtfully at them from behind the door.

"That's right, that's right," Warren said impatiently.

"The Marriage Machine office?"

"The Marriage Machine!" Doug said. He reached out and caught Betty's shoulder. "*That's* it! Isn't it, Betty? This has something to do with the Marriage Machine!"

The strange girl said: "I wonder if you can help me—"

"Later!" Warren snapped.

"Well, Betty? Does it?"

"No—yes—" She put her hand through her hair. "I don't know *what* to tell you, Doug—"

The young man's arms dropped to his side, and he looked forlorn.

"Then you found out," he said dully.

A tear squeezed itself out on Betty's cheek. "I—I couldn't help it, Doug. I wanted to see—"

"I hated to tell you," Doug said. "It seemed so—so artificial or something. And I wanted to find out for myself—if you were really everything I was looking for—"

"Hey," the girl in the gray suit said vexedly. "I'm trying to find—"

"Please!" Doug said. He put his hand on Betty's arm. "You don't really *mind*, do you? I mean, you believe in this Parson of yours—"

"Yes," Betty said, at the beginning of a sob. "That's the trouble—"

"If you have such faith in the Parson, then everything should be fine between us. After all, it was the Parson that brought me to you—"

"Brought *you*?"

"I didn't want to tell you before. I had my disc run through on the EMCC in Hartford. Branch Twenty-one. You were one of the Parson's choices. That's why I came here—"

"But I thought—" Betty was dazed. "But Warren—"

"Just a little joke," the branch manager said. He

backed away from the girl.

"You *didn't* run my disc into the machine! You ran somebody else's! Some girl the Parson picked out for *you*—"

Warren's smile wasn't convincing. "Ha!" he said, fingers digging into his collar. "Just a joke, Betty. Girl was really Floria Gunderson—"

"Floria who?" the girl in gray said.

"Gunderson," said Warren.

"Ha!" the girl said: "That's me!"

She threw herself into his arms. "Warren!" she cried.

"Betty!" Doug said.

"Darling!" said Betty.

It was a triumph of Science.

**THE END**



# ACCORDING TO YOU...



BY THE READERS

Dear Editor:

Not being a writer I really don't know how to properly criticize, but I feel called upon to do so. I realize that, as an editor, you prefer to receive compliments, believe me my continued subscription to *Fantastic* is meant as one, but . . .

Who exposed Mr. Randall Garrett to the latest copy of "Tarzan"? In all my 15 odd years of plowing through s-f stories I have never read anything like "The Vengeance of Kyvor." If repetition is the keynote of the day, perhaps then some merit could be granted to the story. It's not necessary for me to quote the instances as they stand out like BEM in Sunday School.

I am fully aware that there are only 6 basic plots in this world of literature, but believe me, Garrett's version has been worked, and worked over again.

With the exception of the above mentioned I think the quality of the magazine is the highest and the illos excellent.

Kenneth D. Watson  
Teleman 1/C U.S.N.  
OC Division  
USS Scanner (YAGR-5)  
c/o FPO San Francisco, Calif.

• *We're as sincerely sorry you disliked "Kyvor" as we're glad you liked the rest of the stories. Guess we can't bat a thousand every issue, but we'll keep trying, and your subscription is a compliment indeed. The finest kind.*

Dear Ed:

Your April issue of *Fantastic* was somewhat of an improvement over previous issues and yet set a new low in other respects. The improvements first: Compared to most of the artwork which I considered poor there was the excellent work of Finlay and the up-and-coming art by Schoenherr.

As for the fiction, "The Vengeance of Kyvor" seems to me like a sick imitation of Tarzan although I know Randall Garrett can do much better than this. "Benny's Bar" and "Abe Lincoln-Android" were two fair stories. Written well but not much of a plot to work on. I know you want action and adventure in *Fantastic*, but please try and add a little quality to this. You'll get fine results I assure you.

I wish you'd leave the departments and fillers out. They're a waste of space. If you must have these childish puzzles, at least have them based on science fiction.

I agree wholeheartedly, with Kirby McCauley, that you should go back to pulp size. If not pulp size, just the superior fiction which *Amazing* and *Fantastic* used to print. There was action and adventure but plenty of quality. And you know yourself that the books were more popular then than they are now. You told Kirby McCauley that you "honestly felt that the stories you are printing today are better. So that's what *you* think. Don't you care about your readers? They are the ones who govern the success of the magazine. Please them and you're set. If you continue to print the material which pleases only the editorial staff you're doomed.

Bill Myers

4301 Shawnee Circle

Chattanooga 11, Tenn.

• *Honest, Mr. Myers—what we think isn't based on what we think at all—if you get what we mean. What we think is based, to the best of our ability on what our readers think. And we must be hitting it fairly well, because if we weren't they'd punish us by not buying Fantastic in droves. And they're snapping it off the stands all over the world.*

Dear Editor:

I'd like to add my comments to those concerning *Fantastic*. "The Vengeance of Kyvor" is the best serial yet. Just like the

Burroughs' novels. The cover was misleading for "Bottle Baby" and the story was painfully funny. By the way, on the cover she is strawberry blonde, on the inside, canary yellow.

Tim Fleix

9255 Carthay Cir.

Spring Valley, Calif.

• *Tim, will you speak to Mr. Ayers, whose letter appears here, and tell him how wrong he was about "Vengeance..."? Thanks.*

Dear Editor:

I realize that you're out to capture as much of the teen-age trade as you can, and you're probably right on that being the best potential market to corner. The Good Lord knows that there are not too many of us older fans to support all the magazines on the stands these days; but methinks some of your stories of late are getting to be a bit too juvenile. And I think good action yarns will keep the trade better than some of this kiddish stuff will. However, I may be wrong.

What is this about dropping serials? These many comments you've been getting must be the bunch that aren't getting printed herein? By all means continue these two and three part serials; a long yarn is generally a much better story than its shorter relations.

"The Vengeance of Kyvor," although holding point for point with the tried and true Burroughs' tradition, was quite entertaining and very well done. Finlay's illo for the yarn was also one of the best that he's turned out, now or some years ago. A strong second place goes to Don Wilcox and his "Graygortch." Anyone that read *Amazing* and *Fantastic Adventures* during the forties knows the stories this boy Wilcox can turn out; so a hearty and sincere welcome back, Don. The other yarns were quite readable, although I thought that "Bottle Baby" would have been more at home in *Dream World*. Overall rating, best of '57 so far!

Herbert E. Beach

210 West Paquin

Waterville, Minn.

• *We thought "Graygortch" was one of the finest stories of*

*its type we ever read. Are you listening, Don Wilcox, wherever you are?*

Dear Editor:

Another top hit. The April issue was better than ever. Everyone of the stories had lots of fantasy ingredients in them.

The features are always interesting. One can usually pick up intriguing facts from "It Sounds Fantastic But . . ."

W. C. Brandt

APT. N

1725 Seminary Ave.

Oakland 21, Calif.

• *"It Sounds Fantastic But . . ." is proving to be one of the most popular features we've run in many a moon.*

Dear Ed:

Enjoyed the April *Fantastic* very much. The top spot in the issue was "Bottle Baby." Wish you weren't going to stop the serials right at the height of their popularity. Glad to see Don Wilcox back. Valigursky's recent covers have been great by me.

Richard Brown

127 Roberts St.

Pasadena 3, Calif.

• *We wish also that the serials had been more popular. We like them too. But you can grab yourself a copy of "20 Million Miles to Earth" and read a whole "serial" at one sitting.*

Dear Editor:

"The Unemployed" was my idea of a real good short short.

James W. Ayers

609 First St.

Attalla, Ala.

• *As you'll remember, "The Unemployed" was written by Doris Greenberg. It came in unsolicited and while we'd never heard of the lady, we can still recognize a good story. A short time after it appeared, Henry Slesar, one of our finest writers strolled into the office and said, "I see you bought a story from Doris Greenberg." We replied, "Sure did. Do you know her?" Henry grinned. "I ought to. She's my sister." Moral: You can't keep a good family down.*

# It Sounds Fantastic, But . . .

Kenneth Yates of Lancashire, England, ate sixty loaves of bread, forty black puddings and eight-four meat pies every week when he was nineteen years old.

Andre Pollaert, a butcher of France, won an eating contest by consuming the following menu twice and then eating a 12-egg omelet: soup, a dish of relish, several chicken pies, a chicken with peas, a duck garnished with cauliflower, a steak with green beans, ham and salad, cheese, three kinds of tart and some tea cakes, all washed down with wine.



Glen Johns claimed the egg-swallowing championship of Fort Erie, Ontario, after consuming two dozen eggs in twenty-six minutes.

The title of world's champion chocolate-eater probably goes to Arthur D. Ganong, head of the candy company of the same name. Mr. Ganong has consumed three pounds of chocolates every day for sixty years, ever since he was nineteen.



Two racial extremists of diet are the Yakut of Siberia and the African pygmy: the former has been known to eat forty pounds of meat a day and the four-foot African can eat fifty to sixty bananas at a sitting.

A Trinidad engineering student at the University of Mani-toba captured a beer-drinking championship over sixty-five other contestants by consuming  $2\frac{1}{2}$  Imperial gallons of the beverage in  $2\frac{1}{2}$  hours.

Tom Hill of England was presented with a silver tankard for drinking 11,000 gallons of beer. At the rate of two quarts a night it had taken him sixty years!

The great French painter, Jacques Louis David, regarded large meals as commonplace. Upon one occasion he was seen to consume for breakfast the following repast: four dozen oysters, four mutton chops, a large beef steak, potatoes, two whiting, six smelts, and four bunches of grapes.

—R. S. Cragg



# KNOW YOUR SUPERMEN

*Science Fiction is full of Venusian Napoleons and Martian Hitlers. But how is your knowledge of the real conquerors who thrived right here on Earth? You're unusually well-informed if you get 18 out of 20 in this quiz. 15 is still pretty good. So see whether or not you can bring the conquerors down to size.*

---

- |  | T                        | F                        |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. The Carsican whose army came to grief at the hands of Russian peasants was Napoleon.              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. The Mongolian conqueror of Asia who overran Europe as far as the Dnieper was Kublai Khan.         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. The Roman general Pompey won his laurels by defeating the Gauls.                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Attila the Hun was known as "The Scourge of God."   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Balboa was a Spanish adventurer who defeated the Aztecs, claiming Mexico for Spain.               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. Hannibal the Carthaginian came close to capturing Rome but was defeated by the tactics of Fabius. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. Pizarro was the Spaniard who conquered the Incas in Peru.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. Garibaldi was the dictator who wished to revive the ancient glories of Rome.                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. The last man to invade England successfully was William of Orange.                                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. Hitler was frequently jailed for disturbing the peace in Germany during the 1920's.              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. Darius was defeated by the Greeks at the battle of Salamis.                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. The Empire of Alexander the Great extended as far as India.                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13. Tiberius Caesar defeated his rival when the latter was involved with Cleopatra.                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 14. Charlemagne defeated the Saracens at the Battle of Tours.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15. Frederick the Great of Prussia really wanted to be a musician.                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

16. Constantine was the first Roman emperor to go into battle under the sign of the cross. ☐ ☐
17. Richard III was a leader in the Third Crusade. ☐ ☐
18. Ferdinand and Isabella finally drove the Moors out of Spain. ☐ ☐
19. Salaman united the tribes of Israel into a nation. ☐ ☐
20. Hirohito was emperor of Japan when that nation won the Russo-Japanese war. ☐ ☐



## KNOW YOUR SUPERMEN

### ANSWERS

1. True. 2. False. Timur, who came to be known as Genghis Khan, overran most of Asia and part of Europe in the 13th century. Kublai Khan was his grandson. 3. False. Julius Caesar, who first observed that Gaul was divided into three parts, conquered them all; then he conquered Pompey. 4. True. 5. False. Ferdinand Cortez first planted the Spanish flag in Mexican soil; Balboa is noted for discovering the Pacific Ocean. 6. True. 7. True. 8. False. Mussolini was fond of regarding himself as an heir of the Caesars (the word Fascism is derived from the Latin, *fascis* or rods, the symbol of office in ancient Rome); Garibaldi was an Italian patriot in the 19th century, active in the liberation and unification of Italy. 9. False. It was William, Duke of Normandy, known as the Conqueror. William of Orange and his wife Mary were invited to rule England in 1688 by the large faction of British who opposed the Catholic policies of Mary's father, James II. At the crucial moment, James fled, rather than fight, bringing about a bloodless Revolution. 10. True. 11. False. Darius was defeated at Marathon in 490 B. C.; his son Xerxes was defeated at Salamis in 480. 12. True. 13. False. Augustus Caesar defeated Antony while he was whiling away his time with Cleopatra, thus becoming the first Roman emperor. 14. False. Charles Martel turned back the tide of Saracen invasion of Europe in 732. Charlemagne was his grandson. 15. True. His father forced him to become a soldier, but his court was a great cultural center and he himself found time to compose. 16. True. 17. False. Richard I or the Lion-hearted led the Third Crusade in 1189. Richard III (The "hump-backed King") ruled 1483-85. 18. True. 19. False. David defeated the Philistines, first ruled united Israel. 20. False. Hirohito ruled Japan during World War II.

# Yes! Take "SATELLITE"

plus

## ANY 2 OF THESE BEST-SELLERS

for only \$1.00

WITH MEMBERSHIP IN THE

### Science-Fiction Book Club

—Continued from other side

**IT'S TRUE!** You get "SATELLITE" plus ANY 2 of these other exciting books—worth up to \$11.40 in publishers' editions—for only \$1 if you join this new kind of book club NOW. They're all by top-flight authors. And they're loaded with rocket-fast reading that takes you soaring through time and space. All in handsomely bound library editions you'll be proud to own! Mail coupon below—without money—TODAY!

#### TREASURY OF SCIENCE-FICTION CLASSICS

4 famous novels; a complete play; scores of all-time great S-F stories, including H. G. Wells' "Invasion from Mars," made famous by Orson Welles' hoax newscast. (Publ. ed. \$2.95)

#### OMNIBUS OF SCIENCE-FICTION

43 classic stories by top authors. Wonders of Earth and Man, Amazing Inventions, Space travel and visitors from outer space, Adventures in dimension, Worlds of tomorrow. (Publ. ed. \$3.50)

#### SEND NO MONEY —Just Mail Coupon

Indicate on coupon your choice of ANY 2 of these new science-fiction masterpieces which you want in addition to "SATELLITE!" One book will be considered your first selection for which you'll be billed only \$1 plus a few cents postage. The other 2 are FREE as a membership GIFT. Every month you will be offered the cream of the new \$2.50 to \$3.95 science-fiction books—for only \$1 each. You take only those books you really want—as few as four a year. But this offer may be withdrawn at any time. So mail coupon RIGHT NOW to:

SCIENCE-FICTION BOOK CLUB  
Dept. FAN-7, Garden City, N. Y.

#### THE ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION ANTHOLOGY

A story about the first A-Bomb . . . written before it was invented! Plus a score of other best tales from a dozen years of Astounding Science Fiction Magazine. (Publ. ed. \$3.50)

#### THE BEST FROM FANTASY AND SCIENCE-FICTION (New edition)

17 thrilling stories selected from Fantasy and Science-Fiction Magazine. Adventure in other worlds . . . mystery; intrigue, suspense! (Publ. ed. \$3.50)

#### DRAGON IN THE SEA

by Frank Herbert

You're on a 21st-century undersea mission from which no human has ever returned. Now, 8000 feet down, you learn that an unknown crewman wants you DEAD! (Publ. ed. \$2.95)

#### BEST SCIENCE-FICTION STORIES AND NOVELS: 1956

Ed. by T. E. Dikty

14 top-notch short stories and novelettes by such well known writers as Robert Bloch, Frank Robinson, Mark Clifton, many others. (Publ. ed. \$3.95)



#### SCIENCE-FICTION BOOK CLUB

Dept. FAN-7, Garden City, N. Y.

Enroll me as a member, and rush me my full-length hand-selected bound copy of "SATELLITE!" plus the two books indicated below. Bill me only \$1 (plus few cents shipping charges). Every month send me the Club's free bulletin, "Things to Come," so that I may decide whether or not I wish to receive the coming monthly selection described therein. For each book I accept, I will pay only \$1 plus shipping. I do NOT have to take a book every month (only four during each year I am a member)—and I may resign at any time after accepting four selections.

**SPECIAL NO-RISK GUARANTEE:** If not delighted, I may return all books in 7 days, pay nothing, and this membership will be cancelled.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Astounding S-F Anthology    | <input type="checkbox"/> Dragon in the Sea        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Best from Fantasy and S-F   | <input type="checkbox"/> Omnibus of S-F           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Best S-F Stories and Novels | <input type="checkbox"/> Treasury of S-F Classics |

Name \_\_\_\_\_ (PLEASE PRINT)

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Zone \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Selection price in Canada \$1.10 plus shipping.

Address Science-Fiction Book Club (Canada), 105 Bond St. Toronto 2. (Good only in Continental U. S. and Canada)

# **Now!** Top Experts Reveal Full Facts on the First SATELLITE!

The fascinating stranger-than-fiction  
story of our satellite  
...authoritative facts not even available  
in technical journals

**S**TARTLING HEADLINES have recently announced that the U. S. will begin man's exploration of space by launching a satellite—*within the next two years!* But just how will this fantastic object work? What will it accomplish?

Here is the first book to supply all the answers—more com-

pletely, more accurately than technical journals themselves! Erik Bergaust and William Beller disclose in clear detail the present rocket and satellite program, and what the first satellites will tell us—about the moon, the planets, the sun; about predicting weather far in advance; about mysterious cosmic rays; about many other factors which affect our lives.

This book of astounding facts is every bit as exciting as the most thrilling science-fiction.

And the wealth of information revealed here for the first time — will amaze and fascinate you!



**TAKE THIS AMAZING BEST-SELLER**

**Plus ANY 2 SCIENCE-FICTION CLASSICS**

(shown on the other side)

for only \$**1<sup>00</sup>**

WITH MEMBERSHIP IN THE

**Science-Fiction Book Club**

VALUES UP TO \$11.40

—See other side for full details